JORDAN PEELE'S NOPE

CRIMES OF THE FUTURE: CRONENBERG IS BACK

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WORKING FOR THE WEEKND

MAKEUP FX WIZARD MIKE MARINO FACES THE MUSIC

JORDAN PEELE BREAKS HIS SILENCE!

SLASHER NATION: STEPHEN GRAHAM JONES TELLS ALL!

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MONSTERS! ALIENS? BIZARRE CREATURES!

VIOLENT CHIMP ATTACK!

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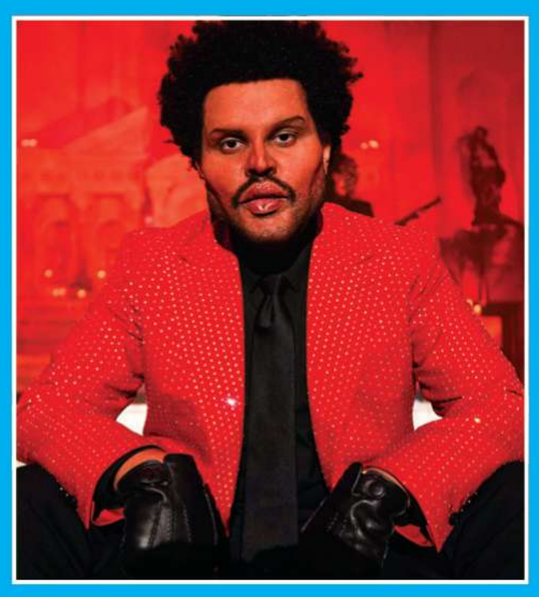
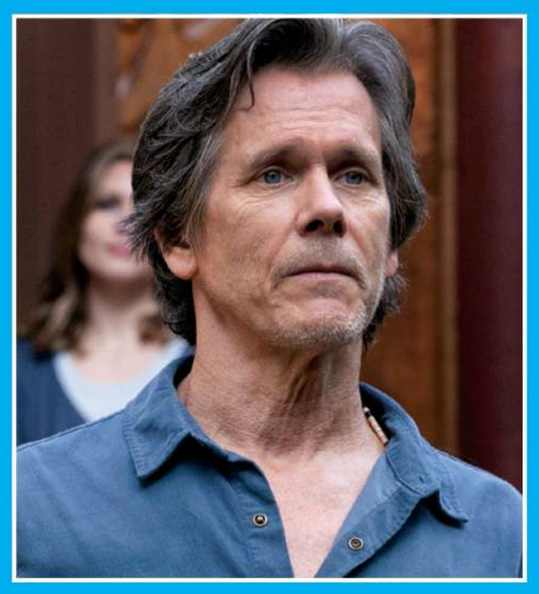
HOTTEST NEW SURGERY TRENDS!



THE WEEKND FACES THE MUSIC!



KEVIN BACON HEADS BACK TO SUMMER CAMP!

CHILD ACTOR SURVIVES MONKEY MAULING!

APE'S BLOODY RAMPAGE CAUGHT ON CAMERA IN NOPE

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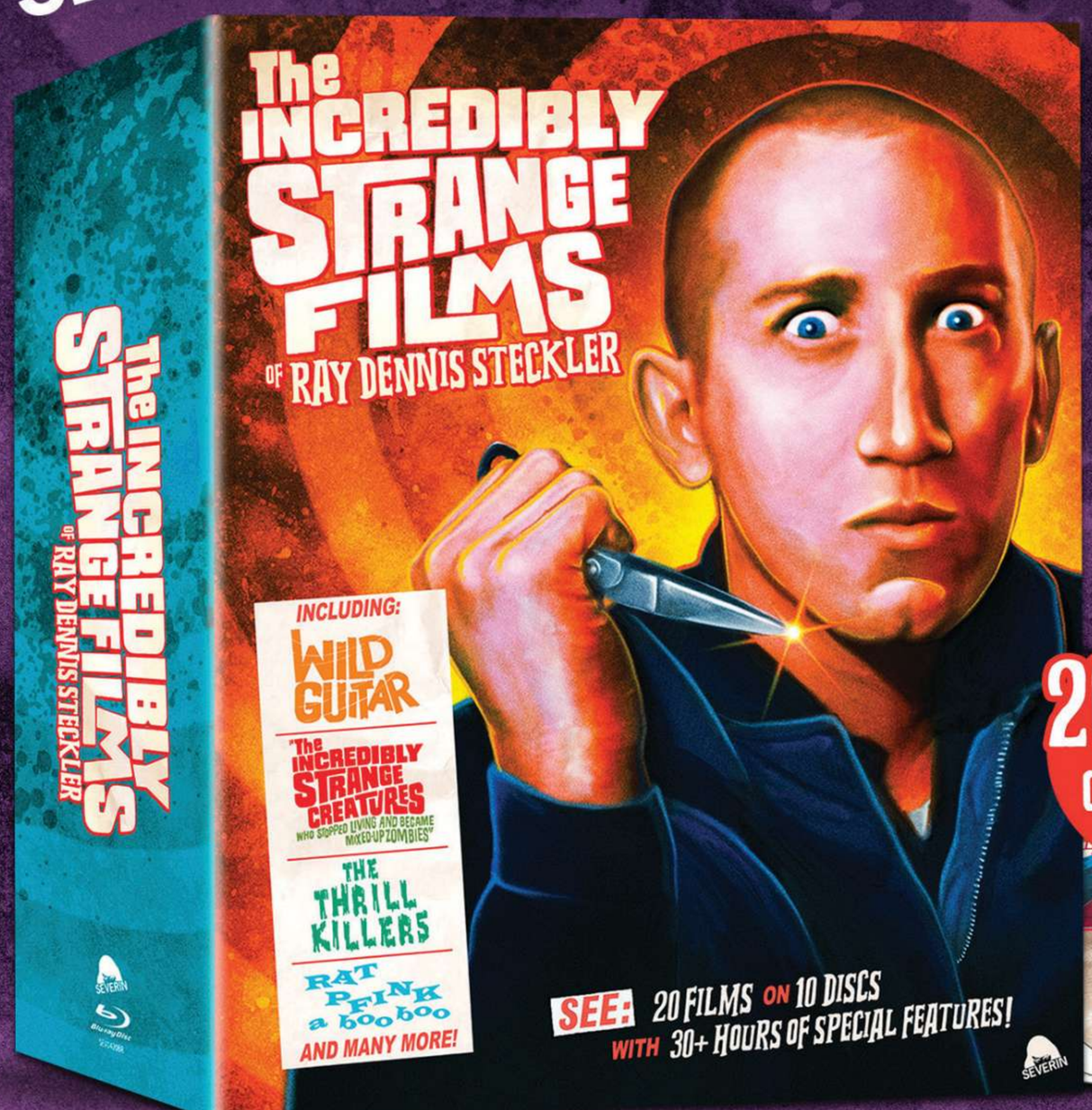
SEVERIN

"A LOW-BUDGET AUTEUR WHOSE SURREALISTICALLY IMPOSSIBLE PLOTS WENT BEYOND ZOMBIES TO DISPLAY SUPERHEROES, ROCKERS, BIKINI-CLAD BEACH GIRLS AND FLOURISHES OF WHAT SOME SAW AS INSPIRED MOVIEMAKING."

The New York Times


The INCREDIBLY STRANGE FILMS
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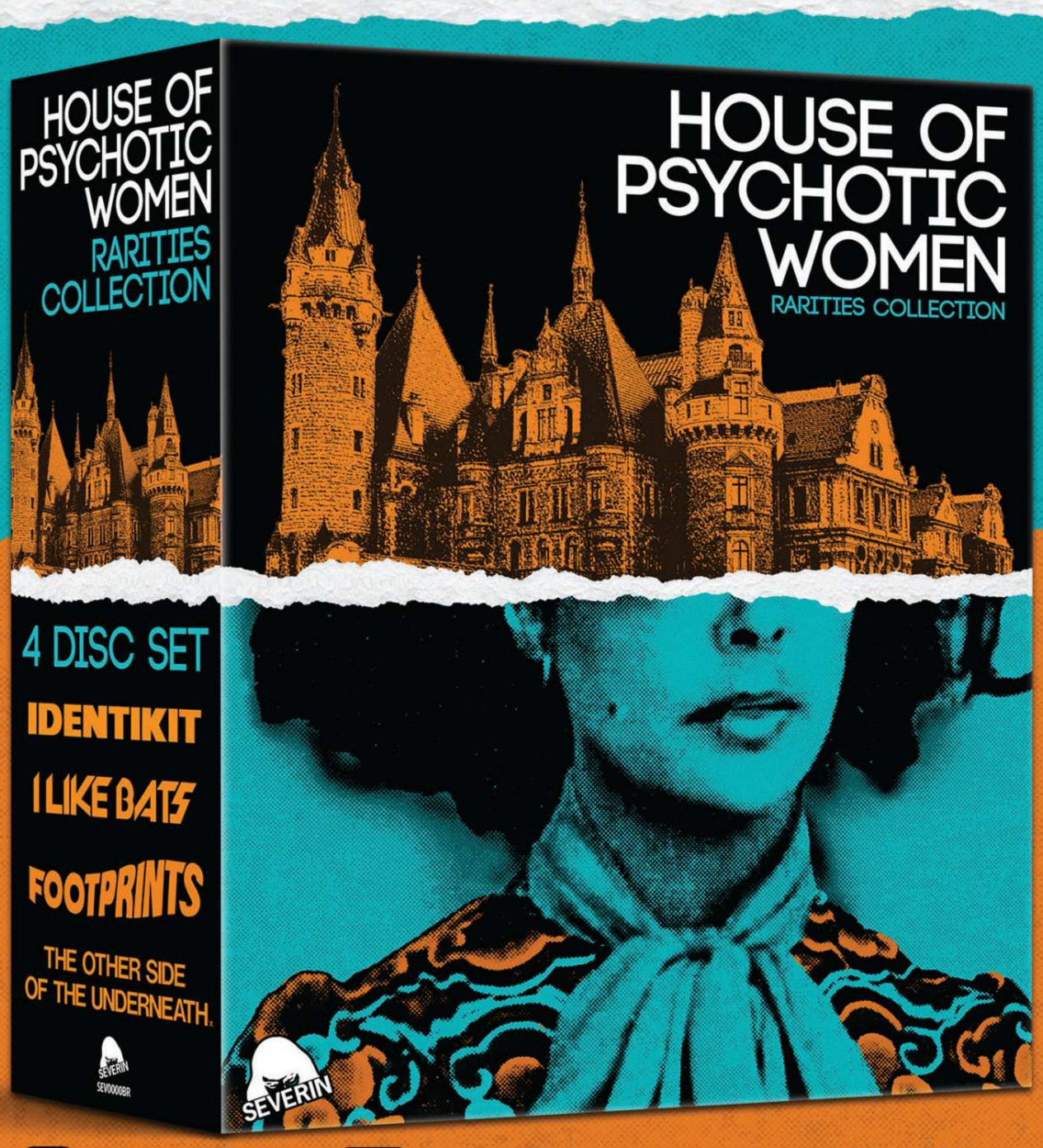
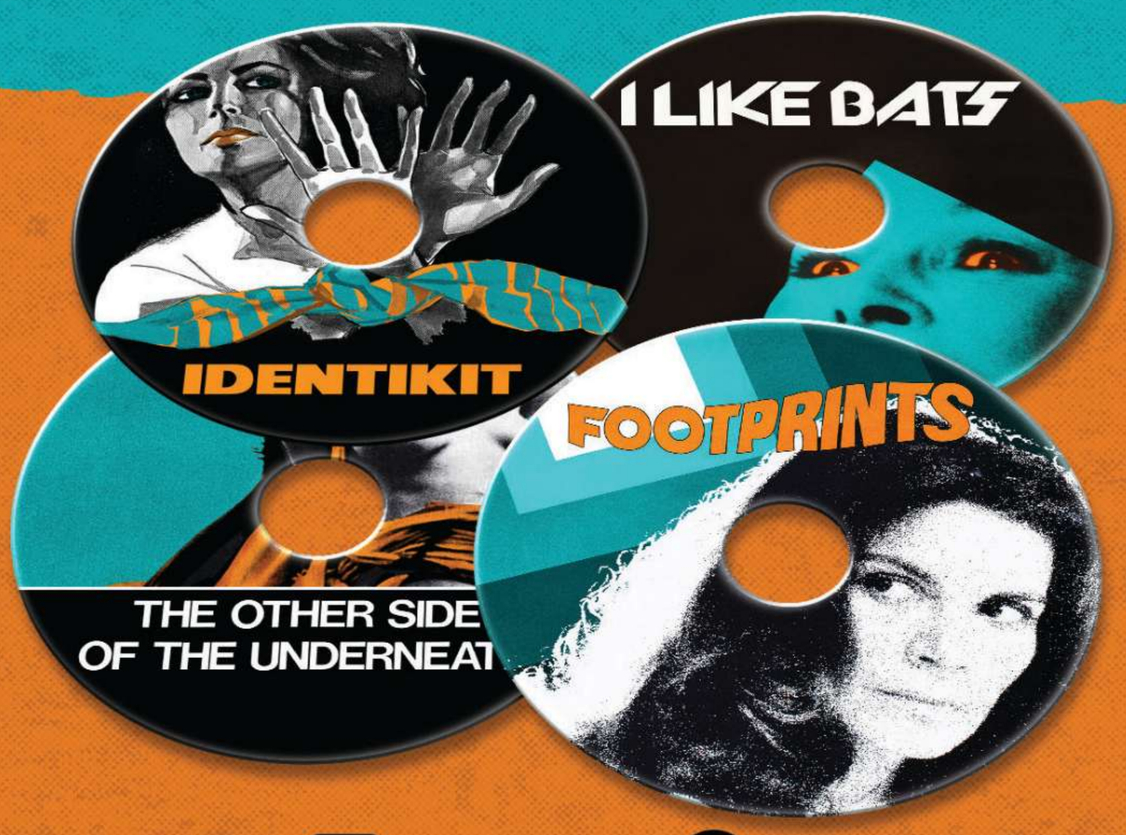


"GROUNDBREAKING... *HOUSE OF PSYCHOTIC WOMEN* IS ONE OF THE MOST INFLUENTIAL PIECES OF FILM ANALYSIS OF THE 21ST CENTURY. KIER-LA JANISSE IS A LEGEND IN THE GENRE COMMUNITY."

Screen Anarchy



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FANGORIA

JULY 2022
VOLUME 2 | ISSUE 16

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This issue is dedicated to the memory of Eli the Chimp.

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INVOCATION

YEP

The worst part of this gig is the amount of requests I have to say "no" to. The publicists, filmmakers, writers and artists who fill my inbox with invitations and asks (and sometimes demands) put me in a position that is mathematically at odds with the 100 pages I get to publish every quarter. It's incredibly unpleasant; saying no to so many people rattles me to my guilty, lapsed Catholic core. I absolutely hate it.

The irony is that I get feedback telling me I should be saying "no" to more things. "You shouldn't have put THIS on the cover!" "The old Fango would have never put THAT in the magazine!" Usually these complainers have transparent ideological agendas, but they're trying to play gotcha using a set of rules in which I'm not interested. And they don't realize that for all the "no"s I have to dole out, I live to say "yes" to stuff.

Ian Fleming, the creator of James Bond, said something that I think about a lot: "Always say yes to adventure." Of course, that's an easy platitude for a wealthy old white dude to espouse, but the sentiment is, I believe, for everyone. Jordan Peele could've coasted on intimate psychological thrillers for a decade or more after *Get Out*, but nope (ha) – here he is in this issue, pushing himself with a bigger canvas, and VFX and motion-capture work that's all brand new to him. Makeup FX artist Mike Marino has his pick of Hollywood projects; he didn't need to forge a years-long working relationship with a pop star with a penchant for gnarly prosthetic work in his performances. But Mike is the kind of guy who knows you have to say yes when weird new opportunities (like The Weeknd asking you to mess up his face for the VMAs) come along. Anyone whose life has been molded or shaped by "no" knows the power of "yep." Most of us have mind-numbing jobs and repetitive lives and should run toward the unfamiliar. We're on this rock for a hot minute, and then it's over. Why would you decline to experience as much as you can while you're here?

That's why it's profoundly sad to see so many horror fans, when presented with something that's foreign to them, dropping "no thanks" or "hard pass" into comment sections like some proud declaration of ignorant purity. Just announcing to the world, "I choose to not extend the scope of my existing knowledge, thanks." Good for you? Even if you're committed to hating the content, voice, or point of view that you're against, have you never heard of a hate-watch? Do the work, man!

When someone turns down something she loves at the dinner table, my mother-in-law exclaims, "*Mais fica*," which I'm told translates into "more for me." It's tempting to say that in the face of stubborn fans willfully walling themselves off from the new stuff, but that's not how horror works. There's enough for all of us to say yes. "Yes" opens us up to new perspectives and new possibilities. It expands our experiences and our minds. "No" keeps us in a box. And we'll all be in a box soon enough.

Phil Nobile Jr., Editor-in-Chief

The Postal Zone

People are always asking us how they can have their writing published in FANGORIA. Here you go!
This is your space to get heard, get loud and get opinionated. Brevity is preferred; having a point of view is required.
Hit us up at **MAIL@FANGORIA.COM**

FANGO EMPLOYEE MAKES GOOD

THE KINGCAST's Scott Wampler may be a weird (funny) motherfucker, but he and Eric Vespe did an interview with Elijah Wood towards the beginning of the pandemic where he mentioned Nicolette lozenges. I quit smoking a week later after a 17–year habit and will credit Elijah Wood, Scott Wampler and Eric Vespe until the day I die.

- Bob Hayden

Well, I for one am glad that Scott has finally proven himself useful to our audience. Maybe there's hope for that kid yet. - PN

X AND THE POWER OF PEARL

I grew up on slashers, and X feels like a slasher film that's grown up with me; Pearl deserves to become an entire horror institution. Her motivation is compelling, complex and surprisingly universal, as she strikes back against the infuriating infantilization of the older generation. Is the murder-via-alligator she commits justified? Of course not. But in a youth-obsessed culture that treats our elderly like adorable novelties, it's deeply satisfying to watch a mature woman rage. Giving Pearl a story devoid of children or cute, quirky hobbies, driven instead by her longing for both her husband and her own lost youth, is powerful and weirdly empowering.

- Kelly Mintzer

So what you're saying is you're excited for the prequel? Girl, same. - PN

TEXAS CHAINSAW RUMBLINGS

For my 41st birthday my wife bought me a *TCM22* shirt from Fright-Rags, well before the movie came out, but hoping the gesture would entice some cosmic force to ensure it was at least a pretty good movie. I'm wearing that shirt as I write this. I didn't understand the vitriol that came from the horror community at large. What the fuck else did you guys want? 74 minutes of pure slashing, are you angry Patrick Wilson (love him) didn't show up? And full disclosure, *TCSM* is my favorite horror film, maybe favorite film period. We are blessed that *TCM22* was even made in the first place.

- Matt From Arkansas

The hidden charm of *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (2022) isn't necessarily one of brains, but definitely one of brawn. The movie is an absolute blast, and if you throw away your super critical lens, it's the most fun to be had with a movie this year. Instead of waiting for years and years for this film to become an "underrated gem," I'd rather fully appreciate it in the present.

- Jaden Oberkrom

'Member in that new *Texas Chainsaw* movie where Leatherface leaped out of the gross nasty water like he was a dolphin, a chainsaw wielding sea critter? That was neat.

- Peanus Hernandez

All valid points. One thing I love about Texas Chainsaw *(my forever franchise) is that there's no pressure for a sequel to be "great." It can just party. And good or bad, I feel like, after ZERO promotion from Netflix, the internet talked about this movie for like a month straight – these days, a win in and of itself. - PN*

PHOTO: YANA BLAJEVA / ©2021 LEGENDARY, COURTESY OF NETFLIX

Michael Gingold's
Exordium

Bad Love

"So bad it's good" can be good, but when the excitement for bad eclipses the good, that's bad.

On March 3, *Bloody Disgusting* editor-in-chief John Squires tweeted, "I'm looking at traffic and Twitter activity and all I'm gonna say is, I wish it was as easy to get horror fans interested in good indie horror movies as it is to get horror fans interested in *Amityville in Space*!"

Sharkula (above) and *Amityville in Space*: does what it says on the tin.

Indeed, the debut of the trailer for that unlikely mix of subgenres had gone viral earlier in the day, and blown up the Twitterverse. John's lament is one I've sometimes shared — and in fact, I'd had the same thought just a day before. Coincidentally (or maybe not so much...), it had to do with another flick by the auteur behind *Amityville in Space*, Mark Polonia. Over at my other gig at *Rue Morgue*, I'd posted an exclusive first look at the trailer for Polonia's *Sharkula*, and the Twitter response was many, many times that which greeted tweets about many far superior movies. It would have been nice to get such attention for my posts about, say, the criminally undercelebrated vampire drama *All the Moons* (and if you haven't seen that one, get thee to Shudder and watch it, on as big a TV as possible). But, as often happens, camp won the day.

No bads on Polonia, who's been keeping the SOV faith longer than practically anyone (he's been cranking out DIY fear fare since the mid-'80s) and clearly knows how to come up with a good gimmick. But in my many years covering the horror beat, it has been occasionally dismaying to see the genre's cheeseball silliness win more attention than its smarter, more serious examples. I can still recall, way back in January 2000, hosting my usual trailer show at a Fango *Weekend of Horrors* convention in New York City. The previews included such major, anticipated titles as *American Psycho*, *Final Destination* and *Scream 3*, but which one got the loudest, most enthusiastic response? *Leprechaun in the Hood*, in which the revelation of Ice-T as Warwick Davis' co-star won a particularly strong reaction. A couple of websites reporting on the con back at the time were also a bit nonplussed about that one.

Cut to the summer of 2013, when the Twitterverse was dominated by *Sharknado*. For a while, it seemed like the only genre movie anyone was talking about was the calculatedly ridiculous

saga combining killer fish and bad weather. Again, no shade on director Anthony C. Ferrante, one of Fango's most trusted scribes for years before he turned to filmmaking, and scripter Thunder Levin; they hit upon and executed a premise that struck a chord and launched a franchise. But the thing is, another satirical creature feature released the same month: *Grabbers*, a UK/Irish production in which island dwellers battle invading, tentacled aliens — and discover that alcohol in their systems gives them an advantage against the blood-drinking critters. *Grabbers*' clever script (by Kevin Lehane), well-pitched direction (by Jon Wright) and terrific special effects result in a highly entertaining mix of horror and humor... one that got completely overshadowed and ignored in the midst of *Sharknado*-mania.

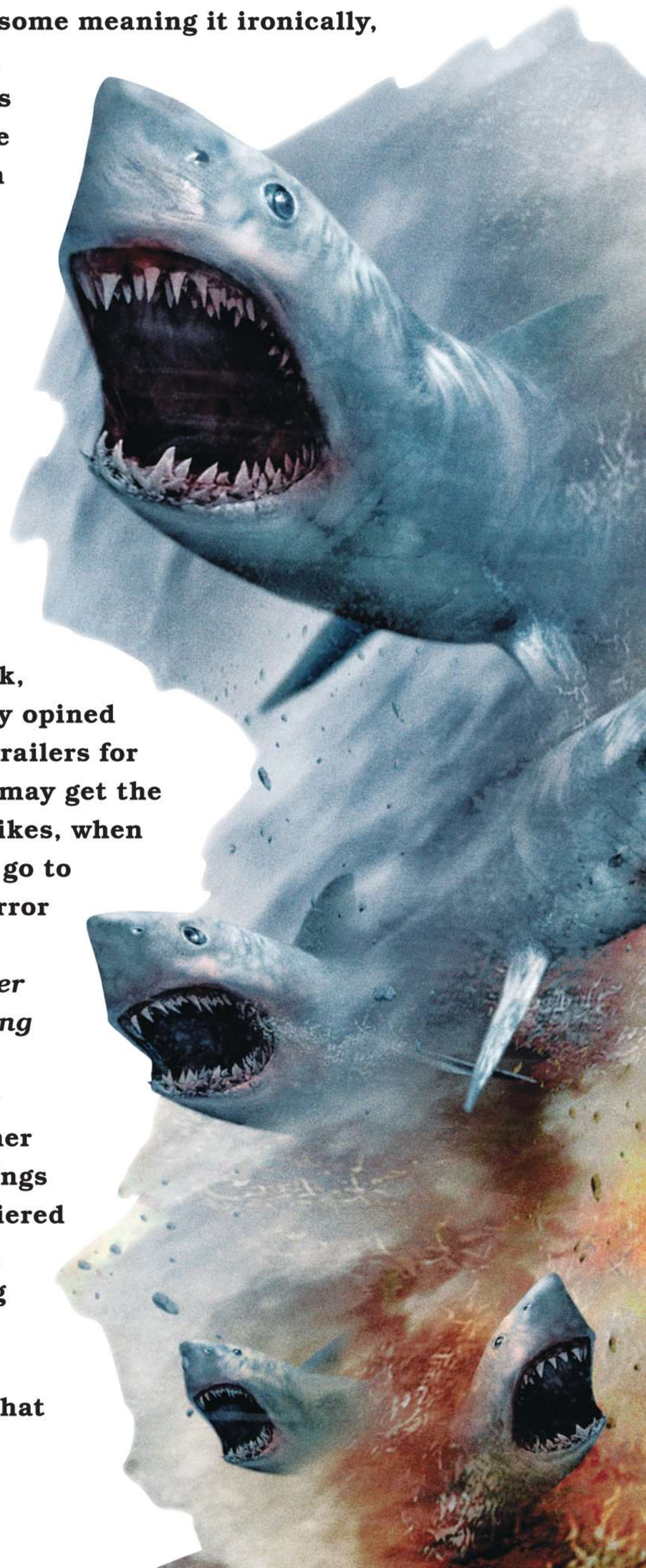
It has even happened in the world of big-ticket stage productions. In late October 2015, I attended a preview of *Misery*, the much-anticipated Broadway adaptation of Stephen King's classic novel. Laurie Metcalf and Bruce Willis were starring, and the adaptation was written by William Goldman, who had also scripted Rob Reiner's terrific movie version. And yet, with all sympathy for Willis — recent reports about his health issues likely explain his listless turn as Paul Sheldon — the production was a major letdown. Metcalf's performance as Annie Wilkes paled in comparison to the movie's Kathy Bates, some of the key action beats were fumbled, and the show in general came off like a dress rehearsal. The weirdest part was the audience, who laughed heartily at not only the intentional black humor, but many of the would-be scary/dramatic parts as well — and yet gave the show a standing ovation at the end, as if the whole thing was intended as a campfest.

Around the same time, I traveled to Hartford, CT, to catch a stage production of *Rear Window*, another literary-based thriller with an incapacitated protagonist that had previously been a hit film. This play was gripping from start to finish, with a terrific lead performance by Kevin Bacon, imaginative stagecraft transforming his apartment into the courtyard outside and back, and development of themes from the Cornell Woolrich short story that hadn't been explored in Alfred Hitchcock's landmark screen version. *Rear Window* also got a standing O, this one deserved, and it shoulda continued to Broadway but never did, and shoulda gotten more attention than *Misery*, which played (at least, the night I was there) like something fated to close out of town.

Now, I'm not about to pretend that I've never enjoyed a movie or other entertainment production for, as they often say, all the wrong reasons. There are bad movies I love, too, topmost among them *The Apple*, the truly bizarre 1980 rock musical/religious allegory in which director/Cannon Films topper Menahem Golan tries vainly to be Ken Russell in *Tommy/Lisztomania* mode. I'll never make a case for *The Apple* as a work of cinematic art, but there's an energy and a commitment to its own berserk vision that I really respond to. And I'm a longtime fan of *Mystery Science Theater 3000*, to the point of attending several of the team's live *MST3K* and spinoff shows.

And yet, there's a part of me that has thought, "How dare you!" when that gang have set their mocking sights on a film I believed was genuinely good (like Jeff Lieberman's *Squirm*). One man's trash has always been another man's treasure, but even as horror has achieved more critical respectability over the last couple of decades, there persists a point of view that sees the genre in terms of its lowest common denominator (that's why we keep hearing and reading the term "elevated horror," which by this point really sets my teeth on edge). It's easy to pinpoint the origins of the celebration of lousiness: the 1979/1980 publications of the Medved brothers' *The 50 Worst Films of All Time* and *The Golden Turkey Awards*, which began a cottage industry of awful-cinema books, including one 2010 tome about "truly bad film" (which I won't promote by naming it) that included the likes of *Re-Animator* and *Suspiria* and *Dead Alive* because hey, all horror is schlock, right?

That approach has continued into the internet age, with podcasts, YouTube channels etc. devoted to "bad movies" — some meaning it ironically, others not. And while everyone's free to celebrate genre cinema in whatever way entertains or fulfills them most, it seems to me that a true appreciation of horror will encompass both the good and the lousy. As for *Amityville in Space* and its ilk, a friend recently opined that while the trailers for such silly stuff may get the clicks and the likes, when people actually go to watch a new horror movie, they'll select *Hellbender* or *The Last Thing Mary Saw* or *Slapface* or any of the many other solid genre outings that have premiered on Shudder and other streaming services in recent months. I like to think that he's right. 💀



SceneQueen

THE JOY OF SFX

OUR FRONTLINE CORRESPONDENT REFLECTS ON HER CAREER-LONG DEALINGS WITH BLOOD AND GORE.

BY BARBARA CRAMPTON

Stuart Gordon once told me, "The best special effect is an actor." Perhaps a bit of flattery, this is only partly true – but an actor's interaction with onscreen carnage does help sell a gore gag to the audience.

My first experience with SFX was completely practical in every way. On *Re-Animator* we had a head separated from its torso, entrails flying out of a body cavity, corpses coming to life and a dead cat named Rufus wreaking mad havoc in a dingy basement. To help John Buechler, Tony Doublin, John Naulin and the rest of their team's fabulous work come to life, the actors had to respond to it with conviction. Jeffrey Combs' and Bruce Abbott's manic banging around the basement, trying to locate the crazed, reborn cat, was not in the script. Jeff also came up with hitting the overhead swinging lamp to add to the creepy, mysterious atmosphere. An older man defiling a captive young girl is scary enough – add in that he's holding his own head in his hands, and it's downright terrifying. David Gale's play of lasciviousness and my shocked distress helped sell the moment – and the painted plaster noggin – as real. Stuart, as our director, prompted us to come up with ways to make the scene more believable for ourselves and the audience.

I wasn't used to working with SFX before my beginnings in horror films, but by the time we wrapped *From Beyond*, I felt like I'd graduated from kindergarten straight to college in terms of my familiarity with blood, gore and slime. As Katherine, I had to slip and slide through a gooey substance that surrounded us in the beyond realm. It was a cold, gelatinous product called methylcellulose, not at all tasty even though it's one of the ingredients in McDonald's milkshakes – and *Beyond* Burgers!

In films as disparate as *From Beyond* and *Superhost* (facing page), the author has seen (and been subjected to) her share of FX work.

The effects on *From Beyond* featured early work from some of the best artists in the business, including Robert Kurtzman, John Vulich, Mark Shostrom, Gabe Bartalos and Greg Nicotero. Together these artists created some of the most memorable creatures in horror history and showcased, in this early film, the heights of what was to become their continuing legacies. The Pretorius creature was able to morph into different beings in the same vein as the entity in *The Thing*, which may have been an influence. In addition to being covered in slime, I was prodded by a pineal gland, bitten by floating miniature eels and almost swallowed whole. All in a day's work, right? The fabrications were spectacular and elaborate, and it wasn't hard to be both awed and repulsed by them when "the Resonator" was as turned on as we were. In one scene, as Katherine's head is being swallowed by a tube of pink jellied flesh, it was a bit hard to breathe. I was encased up to my chest by this otherworldly entity, being mangled and manipulated and stretched. I really felt assaulted by the creature, so my performance was aided by the great SFX work.

We had a robust budget on *From Beyond*, but what happens when the funds are low? I've played in this indie horror world for a long time now, and I've occasionally had to help along a gag that we may not have had enough funds or manpower to deliver. Working on these two early films with such a strong director as Stuart Gordon helped me understand how to work with SFX artists and enhance the amazing work they create.

In the recent *Jakob's Wife*, for instance, we had a mighty yet small crew for SFX. In one scene my character vomits up blood. We had only one take to get it right, and our day was getting away from us. I was in profile on a white rug, bracing my body on hands and knees. But in my upstage hand, I was hiding a small tube, attached to a pump held by Marcus Koch. The pump led to a bucket of good, old-fashioned fake blood. At the precise moment I fell to the ground and opened my mouth to throw up, Marcus pumped the blood from the bucket to my tube, and I acted as though it came out of my mouth, instead of from the tube now hidden directly next to my mouth. The camera angle helped sell this illusion. It worked perfectly on our first try. Thank goodness, because that was our only rug!

I will admit I was always a little sad that Aubrey, my character in *You're Next*, died off-screen, but I did get to play prominently in another actor's spectacular death scene. Aubrey's daughter, played by Amy Seimetz, slices her neck wide open by running into a wire. In the scene, I wailed in agony while Joe Swanberg froze, staring in horror at the demise which had befallen his beloved sister. I think our reactions helped support the shock of the moment that Lino Stavole and Mike Strain had created.

On the recent Brandon Christensen movie *Superhost*, my character Vera is sliced through her cheeks and up into her brain by actress Gracie Gillam. What fun! Brandon explains

PHOTOS: BRANDON CHRISTENSEN

how we achieved this: "Having a background in VFX allowed me to think about it in terms of the pieces required to sell the gag. We had a practical knife built in different stages; one was full and dull, one was a plastic mold, and one just the hilt of the knife with the blade fully removed. What we did was have Gracie use the bladeless hilt to mock the movement of stabbing in reverse, starting on your chin and then yanking. This is a classic trick that has been used for decades with practical effects, and to enhance it, we took the blade itself and held it on your cheek so we had an element we could use in post-production of it protruding from your cheekbone. I then had you move your eyes around in sudden movements, and then had Gracie do the stabbing motion in forward motion so that I could take all of these separate elements together and composite them into the final piece. Everything in the shot is practical; it's just cobbled together digitally so even though it's not 'real,' it still feels real." Gracie and I had to sell the gag on our faces and in our emotions, so that onscreen it felt like a very real and vibrant moment.

Successful special effects require collaboration among the director, the makeup artists and the actors. I'm looking forward to sharing with you all what we have brewing on my next film, *A Suitable Flesh*. It's based on the Lovecraft story "The Thing on The Doorstep" and directed by the great Joe Lynch. If you know the story, you know that we'll be needing *lots* of SFX for this one. Here's hoping it delights and frightens you in equal measure. 💀

Stephen Graham Jones'

SLASHER NATION

What We Talk About When We Talk About

SCREAM

Scream brought the slasher back, it opened the door for more slashers to come through, and it changed the game for horror. Die-hard fan or not, you know this. There was *Psycho*, then there was *Halloween*, and then there was *Scream*. Kevin Williamson and Wes Craven made a scary movie that was part laughs, part screams, and all iconic.

Old news, right?

What I want to get at instead is what was not just new or different or surprising or amazing or timely or timeless about *Scream*, but what was *revolutionary*.

I submit that it's that little story dynamic Williamson hadn't even initially written in, that he only added later, to satisfy the studio:

Billy's motivation for his and Stu's campaign of terror, and all the bodies it would leave behind. When you reduce that motivation to a single word, "Revenge," then it tracks with many of the slashers that came before, which are also built on revenge. If you look closer, though, then the differences become obvious.

Randy: "Everyone's a suspect!"
Billy and Stu: "Uh-huh."

Casey, we hardly knew ye.

Like happens with every genre, though, the literary is often unfairly characterized by one of its persistent traits: adult characters still picking through the remains of their parent's years-gone broken marriage, and continually cutting their fingers on those shards, then nursing those small wounds, letting them become infected, which expresses itself in various self-destructive ways.

This is in stark contrast to the revenge-killers in slashers, who tend to be prompted into action by some lethal or near-lethal "accident," and probably wouldn't use their parents' broken marriage as explanation for their actions.

Until *Scream*. Until Billy Loomis.

Billy's motivation for his and Stu's grand campaign of terror would seem to be all out of keeping with that campaign's inciting incident. His father having an affair with Sidney's mother didn't immediately result in any deaths or mutilations. Yes, it did result in the distinct and palpable trauma of Billy's mother leaving his father, but... how many of us come from similarly broken homes, right? And, how many of us were prompted to become slashers as a result? Not many, I hope.

Scream surprised us in 1996 by killing off its big star, it surprised us by poking fun of the genre while at the same time enacting it, it surprised us by there being two killers instead of the one we were expecting.

And, to be sure here, I'm not suggesting a hierarchy of traumas, as that would only serve to compound whatever trauma ends up getting effectively dismissed. Trauma is trauma, and our responses to it are our own, and completely valid.

What I'm trying to get at is story logic. Which, for the slasher, comes down to the playground, really: when someone pushes you, you push them back, don't you? Pamela Voorhees out killing camp counselors is her pushing back. She's taking lives for the life that was taken from her. Or Cropsy. Him taking his garden shears to raftloads of campers sort of tracks, when you take into account that he was nearly burned to death as part of a *joke*.

Take *Terror Train*, where the prank that kickstarts the cycle of violence is luring an unfortunate soul into what he thinks is going to be a sexual tryst, only... he's in bed with a corpse. Or look at *Friday the 13th*, where counselors, neglecting their duties, allow one of their campers to drown in the lake. Consider *The Burning*, where a prank played on the camp caretaker results in severe trauma and disfiguration, or *Candyman*, where the prank is anything but: a Black man is tortured and killed for his relationship with a white woman. And then there's *Prom Night*, where a kids' game goes too far, resulting in the death of a kid who wasn't even playing.

What all these inciting incidents share is that they severely unbalance the scales of justice, calling on someone or something to rise, *rebalance* those scales. The pranks here are violent and lethal and traumatic. This is what gets the audience on the "side" of these revengers. We see for ourselves the obvious wrongness of that prank, and we even sort of understand, when, say, Pamela Voorhees is blinded enough by her own grief and rage to target not just the guilty camp counselors, but counselors who weren't even born at the time of her son's drowning.

Scream, however, took a different tack in 1996. Billy's not out slicing and dicing because his mother was killed or maimed and no one was ever punished for that. No, his motivations are much more... "literary." By which I don't meant to refer to any "high" calibre of writing — please. And this has nothing to do with that insulting-to-everything-else term "elevated horror," thank you. I'm just talking about what we would, at the box office, call "Drama": stories that don't have spaceships or elves or werewolves.

And, Candyman: can his completely understandable rage ever actually be sated? Or, the surviving twin in *Prom Night*: his sister was killed, and no one was punished. No, we can't condone the lives he takes to rebalance the scales of justice, lives-for-lives just ends up with everybody dead on the floor. But, his impulse makes sense to us, at least. In our weakest moments, we might harbor similar fantasies, even if we reject them almost as soon as they glimmer up, meaning *Prom Night* can kind of make sense to us.

Billy Loomis, though… he's a traveler from the literary bookshelves, isn't he? He's murdering people as a result of his father having had an affair. Does he not know that the proper response to this is to have flashbacks about his parents' crumbling marriage, and then be cursed with enough self-awareness that he can see himself tending down that same path?

Except — that would be the "punishment" being in keeping with the "crime," wouldn't it?

And that's not what *Scream* is about, finally.

Yes, the slasher is nearly always about a disproportionate response — only one camp counselor decapitated Jason's mom, yet he's carved through a dozen installments' worth of those yellowshirts — but, in Billy's case, that response would seem to be not only especially disproportionate, but from a different genre altogether.

Yes, *Scream* introduced a host of new things, and newly dressed up things, to the slasher, and it forever changed the genre for the better. But the actually revolutionary thing it did was to set a literary character down before a weekend's worth of rented slasher videotapes, until that character finally nodded like he knew what to do now: it's not about flashbacks and moping, it's not about substance abuse and learned behavior.

It's about knives and masks.

It was a dynamic we hadn't seen writ this large before, and, surprisingly, none of the neo-slashers that followed *Scream* to the box office seemed to pick up on it. *I Know What You Did Last Summer* is kicked off by a death as the result of negligence. Same for *Urban Legend*, even if our awareness of that accident is delayed. *Final Destination*'s spirit of vengeance — Death, fastidiously rebalancing the scales — is triggered by a whole planeload of people exploding, while *Cherry Falls'* killer is avenging his mother's rape.

Billy, though, he's not taking lives because a life was taken from him. He misses his mother, which hurts and doesn't stop hurting, yes, but, instead of putting the blame for her leaving on his own father, he organizes a bloody campaign of terror against Sidney, who wasn't remotely involved. And, just like a good literary character, he does all of his homework, studies all of the texts, knows all the necessary quotes, can even force pop quizzes on unwilling students like Casey Becker.

Yes, *Scream* surprised us in 1996 by killing off its big star, it surprised us by poking fun of the genre while at the same time enacting it, it surprised us by there being two killers instead of the one we were expecting. But the real alien DNA it was injecting to keep the slasher vital was from the literary bookshelf: it turned out to be thrillingly scary for the "punishment" to be so wildly out of keeping with the crime, and it suddenly put a large portion of the audience in a victim pool previously reserved for those who burn camp caretakers, or let little kids drown, which is to say, it prepared us for a world where you can be a victim of violence simply for going to a concert, a food court, a class.

Be careful whose shoulder you brush, walking past, *Scream* would seem to be saying.

They might pay that back with interest. 💀

Billy commits to the bit.

TIME WAITS FOR NO ONE

MICHAEL MADSEN COSTAS MANDYLOR SARAH FRENCH

DEATH COUNT

JULY 19TH 2022

ON VOD AND IN SELECTED THEATERS

MAHAL EMPIRE PRODUCTIONS

BLAEN-Y-MAES BOOTLEG FILMS

MEZEK FILMS

THEY/THEM

BRINGS THE SUMMER CAMP SLASHER INTO THE 21ST CENTURY

BY PHIL NOBILE JR.

WITH A NOD TO THE PAST AND A FOCUS ON THE MOMENT, WRITER/DIRECTOR JOHN LOGAN SHARPLY UPDATES A TRIED-AND-TRUE SUBGENRE.

Hard pass: Carrie Preston, Anna Chlumsky, Boone Platt, Hayley Griffith and Kevin Bacon welcome you to Whistler Camp.

If you've got anyone in your life still questioning the legitimacy of the slasher film as a valid art form, FANGORIA invites you to direct their attention to writer/director John Logan. As a screenwriter, Logan's been Oscar-nominated for such films as *Gladiator*, *The Aviator* and *Hugo*. He's also a Tony Award-winning playwright, the co-writer of a couple of James Bond movies, and the creator of the acclaimed television series *Penny Dreadful*. He's as legit as it gets, and for his feature directorial debut, Logan has chosen *They/Them* (pronounced "They-Slash-Them"), which brings back the summer camp slasher film with a very modern edge.

In the Blumhouse-produced film (out on Peacock August 6th), a group of LGBTQ+ youths (led by Theo Germaine) arrives at Whistler Camp, a retreat designed by Owen Whistler (Kevin Bacon) to help queer and trans kids "find a new sense of freedom." The camp's methods soon prove to be the stuff of nightmares – and that's *before* someone starts killing people.

FANGORIA spoke to Logan about his slasher faves, using horror to present authenticity, and getting Kevin Bacon back in the slasher game.

I'm curious about your influences in the slasher space. What's your slasher Mount Rushmore look like?

Oh, well, it's Jason Voorhees. The entire mountain is Jason Voorhees. [Producer] Jason Blum and I have been talking about doing *Friday the 13th*, I think for ten years.

Wow!

But the rights were so complicated. *Sleepaway Camp* is another one I grew up on. When I was telling crew members or producers who aren't steeped in the genre about our film, I'd say, 'Watch *Sleepaway Camp*, and you'll see how powerful this genre can be in a way that's so contemporary and exciting that it's almost unbeatable. It's so savage in what it deals with.'

You're an Oscar-nominated screenwriter who, in creating *Penny Dreadful*, took something outlandish – a TV series with vampires, werewolves, witches, and a Frankenstein monster – and made something nuanced and resonant out of it. Now, as your directorial debut, you're making a slasher film. Is there something perversely fun for you in taking what's been perceived by the mainstream as low entertainment, and approaching it with intelligence, craft, and thematic heft?

Yeah, absolutely. In its day, there was no more reviled genre than the slasher film. And I grew up on slasher films and I always loved them. And I thought, 'What a fascinating experiment it would be to try to use

PHOTOS BY: JOSH STRINGER/BLUMHOUSE

that form in a new way.' And when I was growing up, gay characters in these kinds of films were either jokes or victims, and it would've meant so much to me to see a gay hero in my favorite genre. That movie never existed when I was growing up, so I wanted to make it.

There's a film professor, Andrew Scahill, who talks about how, historically, queer fans had to be sort of scavengers; they had to pick through the material to find stuff to relate to or identify with. So a queer '80s kid can *claim* Angela from *Sleepaway Camp* as their trans icon, but that's a bit of a 'death of the author' situation at best.

When I was growing up, it was always a bit like archeology, trying to find that thing that is resonant. Nowadays, thank God, there is this unbelievable tsunami of people using horror to explore social issues. A movie like *Get Out*, a movie like *They/Them* – it's dead center in the storytelling, but it's storytelling that's in a popular medium, and you can find some real truth and provocation within that if you're smart about it.

We're in a post-COVID space with film distribution and the whole model's kind of been blown up, and *They/Them*, which is premiering on Peacock, seems like a film that's poised to kind of take advantage of that.

From the first conversation I had with Jason Blum, we've said, 'This needs to be streaming.' I want kids all over the country to be able to see it. And I want kids in places where stories like this aren't easily told to be able to see it. The kids this was made for might even have to watch it secretly because of the societal pressures around them. Streaming is uniquely powerful for a story like this.

A phrase I've heard among Black horror creatives in recent years is 'Black is the new green.' As in, they're only now getting to tell these stories because it's seen by the studios as trendy or profitable. Is there a frustration that it's taken so long to get to this point for you, or for this genre?

Of course there is. When I started my career, I did big, brawny movies. I did *Any Given Sunday*, and *Gladiator*, and *Last Samurai*, and it took a while for me to be able to write without metaphor, you know? To write characters who are closer to my own queer experience.

And all artists, at their heart, want to tell some version of their story that might be relevant to other people. But I'm an old dog, and it took me a while to even get to the right language for how to address this. I'm 60, and for someone of my generation, even the word 'queer' has resonance to it that makes you uneasy.

Right. It was 100% a slur when I was growing up.

Right! So part of my journey with this film was talking to trans actors and non-binary actors and young queer people about their experiences and what they wanted to express. So it became very collaborative.

A lot of, I'd say... close-minded horror fans who get automatically worked up about pronouns bristled at the film's title. But what struck me is that it's not a particularly solemn use of pronouns. You folks went out of your way to call it *They - Slash - Them*. There's something very arch and winking about that title.

I think audiences can take it. I think the queer community is pretty robust. And I think the horror community is pretty robust. And to push at the edges of something with some wit or some provocation? It's great. To be able to put 'slash' right in the middle of that embraces my genre and tells people what this movie is. It is unapologetically a slasher movie, and if people don't want to respond to it because of the title, that's their choice.

(L-R) Cooper Koch, Anna Lore, Monique Kim, Quei Tann, Austin Crute, Darwin del Fabro, and Theo Germaine: going by classic slasher rules, not many of these folks will see the end of *They/Them*.

IT IS UNAPOLOGETICALLY A SLASHER MOVIE, AND IF PEOPLE DON'T WANT TO RESPOND TO IT BECAUSE OF THE TITLE, THAT'S THEIR CHOICE.

Monique Kim and Anna Lore wonder where all the horror scenes are for this article.

What about this setting – a summer camp that turns out to be a conversion camp for queer kids – spoke to you and sparked this story?

I met a young man who'd been through a gay conversion camp in Utah about three years ago. He told me some of his stories, and it was very upsetting. These places exist. This 'therapy' exists. And we live in a treacherous moment for queer people. There is 'Don't say gay' legislation; there is transphobic legislation. There is a return to a sort of puritanism that I never thought I would see in my lifetime.

All of that led to me wanting to write something exactly about this moment, and to be able to put together a cast of people who could authentically tell their story was really important. And filming in the South… I didn't know how this production would be received. But what happened was, even with so many things filming in the area, a lot of Georgia crew members *chose* to work on *this* movie because of what it was about. And that was moving to me.

The other groundbreaking thing happening here: you got Kevin Bacon to do another slasher movie! 42 years after *Friday the 13th*!

It was the thing that rarely happens to a dramatist: when I was writing it, I heard Kevin's voice as Owen Whistler, the character who runs the camp. It was just as simple as that. 'Oh, I wrote this part for Kevin Bacon.' So I talked to him, I told him what it was, he was instantly fascinated by the idea. And we talked about the complexity of the character, how we wanted to reveal certain parts of the character.

He was great all the way through. And I think he felt a little joy about returning to *Friday the 13th* territory, coming full circle as a mature, celebrated actor. To return to that genre in a meaningful way, I think, was very satisfying for Kevin.

'Kevin Bacon in a summer camp slasher' is an easy hook for Fango, but he's not your lead.

No. Theo Germaine as Jordan is the heart of the movie. When you write a protagonist, it's about that face and that soul, and Theo just has something that is so true and so powerful about the way they approach their work and the way they approach their life, that has genuine grace. And Theo goes through the crucible in this movie; it's a very challenging role. They were always game and excited; Theo is a huge horror fan.

They're living the dream, starring in a slasher film.

Exactly, so just the thought of Jordan walking down a hallway with a flashlight was very exciting for Theo. 'Oh, this is a horror moment!' 'Yeah, Theo, you're doing a horror moment! That's what it is!'

> ALL ARTISTS, AT THEIR HEART, WANT TO TELL SOME VERSION OF THEIR STORY THAT MIGHT BE RELEVANT TO OTHER PEOPLE.

Slasher movie win! Writer/director John Logan brings home the Bacon.

People like labels on their horror now. Is *They/Them* a gorefest, is it a slow burn, is it meta? What's the vibe?

I think we're relatively restrained when it comes to gore; I think we are not restrained when it comes to horror. If you ask me now, 'when were you most frightened in the movie theater?' I would say the original *Halloween*, because the way John Carpenter built that film was like poetry. You would, bit by bit, fall in love with the characters. And before you know it, those characters you love are fighting for their lives. And the one thing people come away from this movie really feeling, in my experience, is that they love the kids. They love these actors and these kids and they love seeing them triumph.

But the horror, and the brutality, and the sinister nature of Whistler Camp – that's all unveiled step by step by step for the audience, until it becomes almost unbearable – the way good horror movies are supposed to do it. 💀

This interview was edited for clarity and space.

PHOTOS BY: JOSH STRINGER/BLUMHOUSE

Everyone's going bananas for the newest member of the family!

GORDY'S HOME!

Now on Friday Nights!

FANGONEWS **EXCLUSIVE**

JORDAN PEELE SPEAKS: THE REAL-LIFE TRAGEDY BEHIND *NOPE*

PEELE SAYS HOLLYWOOD'S ANIMAL MISTREATMENT IS NO JOKE.

'90s SITCOM MAIMING RECALLED IN GRAPHIC DETAIL
VIOLENT CHIMP ATTACK DERAILS PROMISING CAREER
HOLLYWOOD COVER-UP UNEARTHED BY FILMMAKER

Jordan Peele's *Nope*, with its plot about UFO sightings above a California horse ranch, appears to be the Oscar-winning filmmaker's first foray into extraterrestrial, *Close Encounters* territory. But the film's inspiration is an all-too-real, horrifying moment of Hollywood history, FANGORIA can exclusively reveal.

Peele spoke to FANGORIA about the tragic true story behind his new movie.

"I expanded this story into a film about a UFO – it's a big, 'event' film – but it's very much rooted in the horrors of Hollywood, and this industry of spectacle," Peele tells us. "Much like "Hands Across America" was in the core DNA of *Us*, "The Gordy Incident" was the inspiration for *Nope*."

A TRAGEDY AND A COVER-UP

'90s kids will recall the sitcom *Gordy's Home*, which starred then-child actors Ricky "Jupe" Park and Mary Jo Elliott. "The show was about a family of astronauts who, after a space shuttle tragedy, adopted a young Asian American child, as well as a test pilot chimp named Gordy. It was created in the tradition of other mildly offensive premises of the era, like *Webster* and *Diff'rent Strokes*," recalls Peele.

Gordy's Home might be unfamiliar to younger folks because, as Peele says, "a lot of information about this thing has been scrubbed from the internet, so it's hard to find."

"The Gordy Incident," as it came to be known, occurred during production of the show's second season, while taping a birthday party episode. During filming, Elliott was brutally attacked by chimp performer Eli and left permanently disfigured.

"The chimp just went off; attacked Mary Jo, attacked Tom Bogan, and severed three of Phyllis Mayberry's fingers," Peele shares. "It was a spectacle both horrific and glossed over; the network covered it up right away. We hear about it from time to time, but nobody has really shined a light on the attack in a while."

Hollywood circled the wagons, quietly burying the incident and canceling the series. Eli the chimp was put down. Season Two never aired, and the series never made the legacy-securing leap to home video or streaming. In time, *Gordy's Home* was forgotten.

But not by Jordan Peele.

"People didn't realize that these trained animals – specifically chimps – were really put in very cruel situations," Peele states. "They're not meant to be in captivity. The horror of a trained animal attacking... that concept is the cornerstone of the horror of *Nope*."

BEFORE THE BLOODSHED: THE ILL-FATED CAST OF GORDY'S HOME.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF UNIVERSAL PICTURES

DIRECTOR BREAKS SILENCE ON HORRIFYING TRUE STORY THAT INSPIRED HIS NEW FILM

SHATTERED DREAMS: PARK AND ELLIOTT WERE FOREVER CHANGED BY "THE GORDY INCIDENT."

REEL LIVES MEET REAL TRAUMA

Peele took great pains to recreate this terrible incident in *Nope*. "I have not been able to find footage of the actual attack, but we found scripts, so we know it was a birthday episode, and what we can put together is that when Gordy was given a present, he freaked out. We pieced together our interpretation of those lead-up moments in the film."

Though Park and Elliott haven't seen *Nope*, Peele believes they'd be aligned with his goals. "I think that they will find that the horror that I'm tapping into is a horror that they themselves were victims of, which is the human addiction to spectacle."

Peele is sensitive to the fact that the tragedy ended several careers, noting that Elliott was primed to be "the Jenna Ortega of her day before this happened." He's spoken to Elliott and reports that she's "a very strong survivor. A wonderful human."

Ricky "Jupe" Park today runs a Wild West theme park in Southern California, loosely based on his once-popular *Kid Sheriff* movie.

"I haven't talked to him," Peele admits. "He came out of the Gordy attack unscathed, but I'm sure he has very deep emotional trauma. The whole incident really speaks to the savagery of what we'll put child actors through, and what the toxicity of attention can do to somebody."

A CHIMP OF CHANGE

If anything positive came from the tragedy, it was a reckoning with how Hollywood utilizes animals in their films.

"They put a dangerous animal in the same space as actors, crew members, and a live studio audience," Peele notes with a touch of anger. "The Gordy Incident was covered up, but it did change the industry. It's one of the reasons you're not allowed to use a real chimp anymore. You'll notice in the last seven, eight years or so, there are no live chimps being used in any productions."

Peele's passion regarding the subject is palpable, and he feels a reckoning is due. "In the entertainment industry, you observe firsthand the addiction to spectacle. I feel for everyone involved with this tragedy, and I certainly don't intend to offend anyone by revisiting it, but I believe that this is an important story to tell." 💀

Additional reporting by Ian Cooper.

BEHIND THE VEIL: TODAY ELLIOTT IS RARELY GLIMPSED IN PUBLIC.

WRIGHTING THE WRONGS OF NOPE

BY PHIL NOBILE JR.

WRIGHTING THE WRONGS OF NOPE

BY PHIL NOBILE JR.

PHOTOS: GLEN WILSON/UNIVERSAL PICTURES

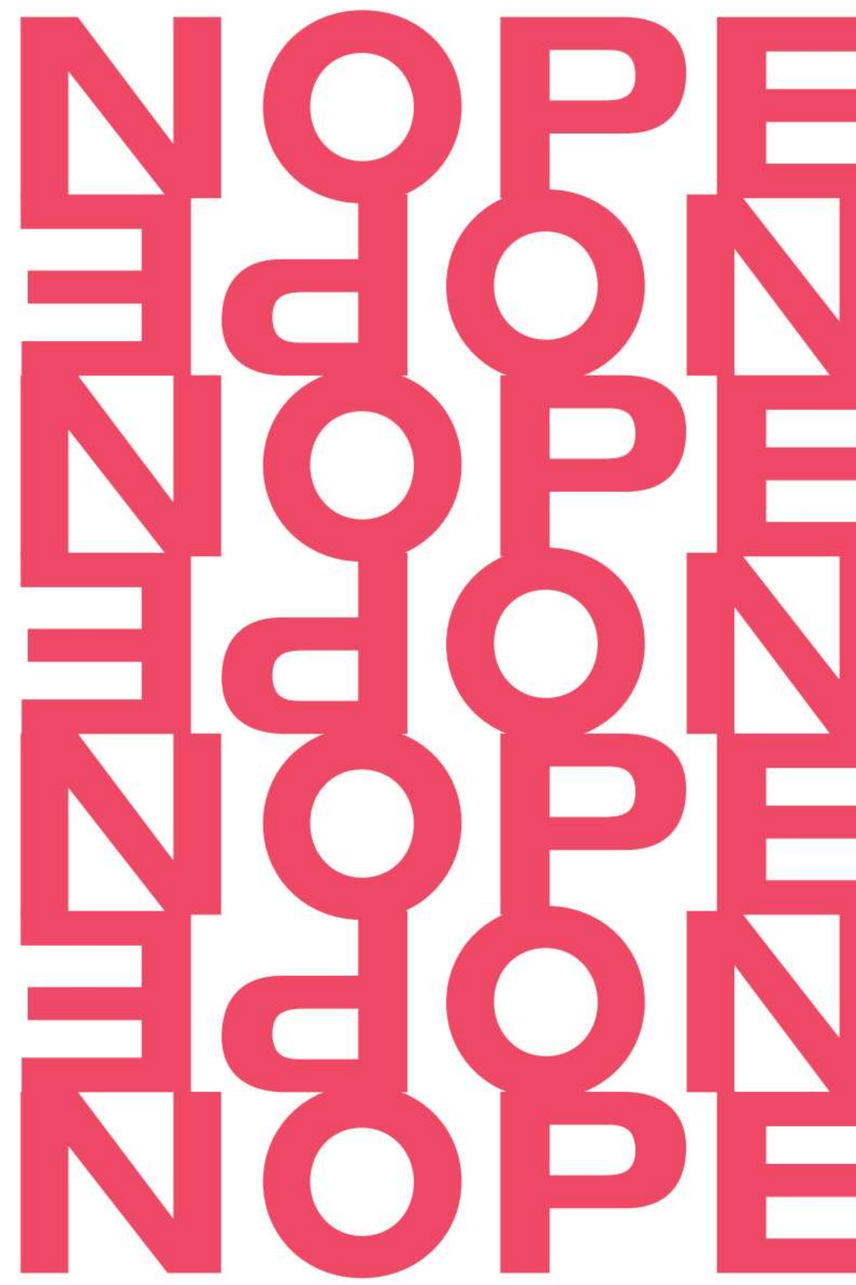
HOW AN ARTIST, TWO SCIENTISTS, AND A MOTION CAPTURE PERFORMER HELPED CONJURE THE UNTHINKABLE IN JORDAN PEELE'S LATEST FILM.

In nature, there is an order to things – a cadence, a rhythm, an energy that every living thing recognizes as a baseline. And when nature is disrupted and that energy is just a little… off, human beings can sense it on an instinctual level. *Something here is wrong.*

This is the energy that permeates Jordan Peele's third film, *Nope*. With a plot wrapped in secrecy (but unspooling in theaters as you read this, so heads up this article contains spoilers), *Nope* finds a pair of siblings (Keke Palmer and Daniel Kaluuya) who run a horse ranch and work as animal wranglers in the film industry. Next to their property, a petting zoo/theme park is owned and run by a former child star (Steven Yeun) who's working through the trauma of his own tragic backstory. It's a bustling, if loaded, ecosphere of animals, humans, history and Hollywood. The group begins to witness a series of unexplained phenomena in their skies and on their land, and thus begins a quest to capture the mystery on camera.

Then, as the official studio synopsis so coyly puts it, "things escalate."

But that "wrong" energy (what Kaluuya's character calls "a bad miracle") is a vibe essential to the film's success, and a delicate thing to pull off. In speaking with various members of the team who helped bring Jordan Peele's N*ope* to life, this shared mission becomes clear. Regardless of specific tasks – delivering artwork that conveyed the uncanny vibe, consulting on the science behind the phenomena presented in the film, or delivering a blood-chilling performance that leaves viewers thoroughly unnerved – the goal was to create a bulletproof reality, and then inject just enough of the unfamiliar into it to knock an audience off its collective axis.



From concept art to motion capture: Terry Notary goes all in on Gordy's defacing of Mary Jo Elliott (Sophia Coto).

"Don't get in the way of it. People try to direct themselves too much and the next thing you know, you've got these predictable moments – three-point landings and shit. The way for me to make something scary is to have it be arrhythmic, off-kilter, slightly erratic. You surprise yourself as a performer and make people feel like 'I can't grasp onto this four-count, this heartbeat that I'm used to feeling. Something feels amiss. I feel like there's a sense of incompleteness.' Then when you hit that moment, they're like, 'oh shit!'"

Terry Notary, the motion capture performer from the recent *Planet of the Apes* trilogy, *Kong: Skull Island*, and *Avengers: Endgame*, is talking about depicting "wrongness." Notary's job on *Nope* is to communicate that primal signal to the audience, to tear down walls of intellect, disbelief and complacency, and to convey to the primordial jelly in a viewer's brain that what they're witnessing *should not be happening*.

In more tangible terms, Notary's task on *Nope* was to breathe life into Gordy, a chimp performer on the set of a '90s sitcom who one day has a breakdown and attacks one of his human co-stars (Sophia Coto), disfiguring her horribly (see page 26). Presented as a flashback – the aforementioned backstory for Yeun's character – it's a scene that stops the audience cold, a moment of pure horror destined for the canon of all-timers.

To achieve it, the motion capture work was approached a little differently. Notary was outfitted in the chimp's blood-soaked clothing and turned loose onto a slightly upscaled set. "I'm wearing a performance capture suit, but I'm also wearing a costume over it. You see the blood and everything on the costume. It's an interesting and cool way for them to approach the mo-cap," Notary says. "Then they upsized all of the furniture and everything. It looked like I was quite a bit smaller than I am. I'm 5' 8", but Gordy was supposed to be like 4' 10", and it worked perfectly."

And what occurs on that set – Gordy tearing a child actor's face partially off – is a terrifying, dread-filled illustration of the anomalous pulse that seeps through the film. "Sophia is a very sweet, little innocent thing, the last person you would think that would be the one that Gordy would pick out to try to kill. It's really sad. It's really kind of gross and morbid, but it had to

be peaceful at the same time," Notary shares. "What made it really scary and eerie and weird is after we filmed, I was doing ADR for the scene. We were trying to see where we should fill in with some sounds. Jordan said, 'Let's just do a pass of you just breathing through the whole scene.' It was one of those things where you just hear the breathing of a killer happening and you feel the effort, the exertion of just the work that it takes." Notary demonstrates over the phone, and we get his point. "The cadence of your breath tells so much about your energy and how the body of the character is behaving, and [through that] what they're feeling. If they're breathing erratically and off-kilter and off tempo, you can just hear the thought process being split, divided, and it's just creepy."

Despite the massive amount of effort and VFX craft involved in bringing Gordy to life, for Notary, the internal choices are where it all comes to life. "It was just kind of a jam session with Jordan on the subtleties of the performance. The big stuff is easy. It's the little things, the moments in between, and the dissolving away from yourself and becoming completely vulnerable and open. You're forgetting the identity of who you are, really. The ego has to dissolve away and then you can become something else. Then you're in it."

For Nia DaCosta's *Candyman*, Monkeypaw reached out to a variety of artists to depict Anthony McCoy's increasingly disturbing paintings (see FANGORIA v2, #12). To help build the world of *Nope*, Peele's producer Ian Cooper once again sourced a young artist, Parker Steven Jackson, a 33-year-old talent from Arizona (and the senior art director for GIPHY) whose Instagram (@parker.s.jackson) immediately reveals why he was hired for this gig. "Channeling the uncanny is something I try to do as a concerted effort with all of my work," Jackson says. "I try to find a balance between realism with enough of something that makes it look 'off' that it just makes your brain confused and uncomfortable."

"THE WAY FOR ME TO MAKE SOMETHING SCARY IS TO HAVE IT BE ARRHYTHMIC, OFF-KILTER, SLIGHTLY ERRATIC. YOU SURPRISE YOURSELF AS A PERFORMER."

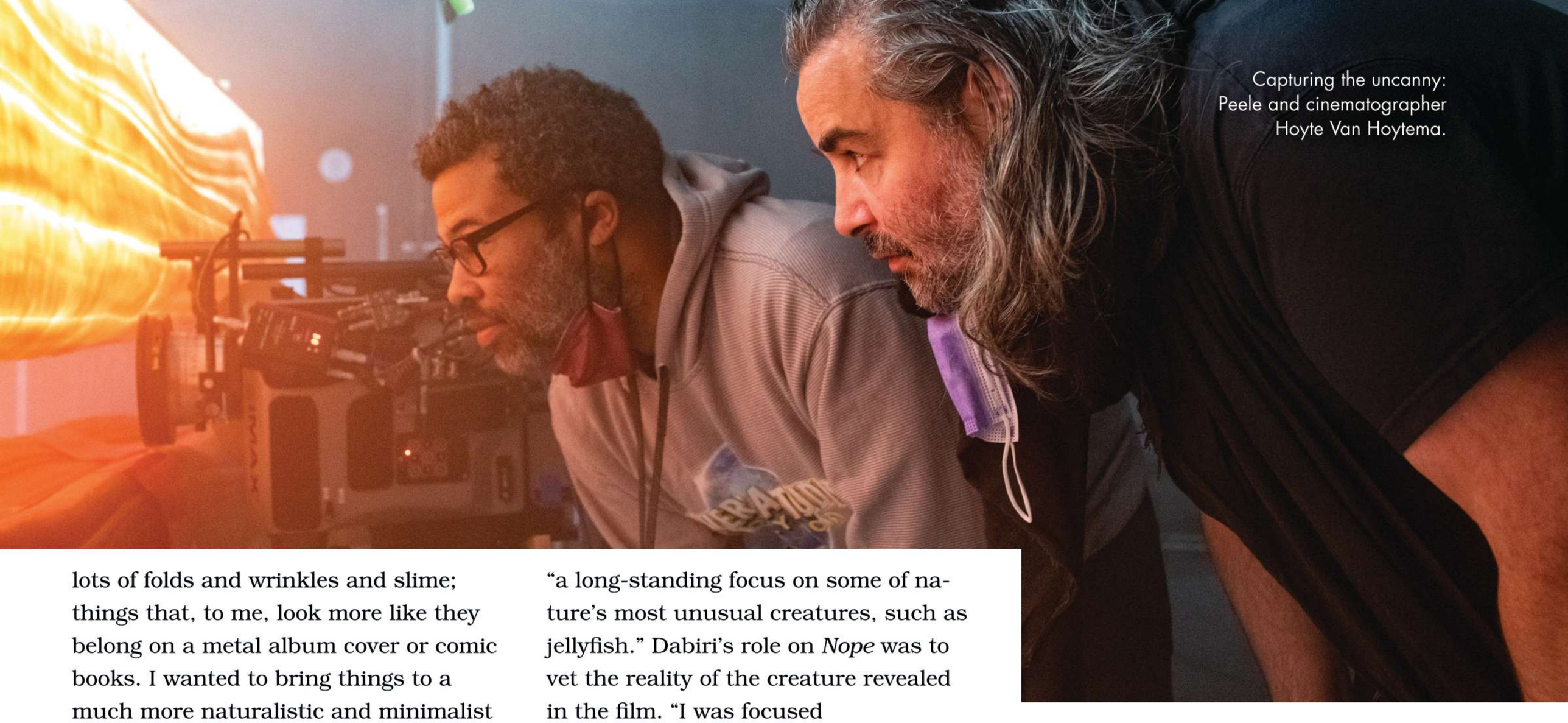
- TERRY NOTARY

Jackson initially was tasked with creating an alien mask used in a faux jump scare moment in the film, but soon found himself taking on other duties. "I got to read the script and had a much greater understanding of the subtext and symbolism and tried to incorporate a lot of that into the design process," he says. As speculation about aliens swells within the film, Yeun's character begins selling little alien dolls at his attraction, but the design seems to be leaking from his subconscious mind – specifically, his memories of the Gordy Incident. "The alien doll design is supposed to be what his character essentially imagines the aliens to look like; it's a sort of chimera of his own childhood traumas," Jackson reveals. "There's some chimpanzee in the design, and some barn owl, and then your classic Whitley Strieber 'Communion' grey alien design. It's familiar yet uncanny, just like what we wanted."

Jackson is grateful that certain monster clichés were avoided. "While I'm certainly a huge fan of horror and special effects masters, there's very much a 'look' that they all tend to gravitate towards when they design monsters and creatures, all of which tend to be sort of overly 'monster-fied.' Big crazy eyes and lots of tiny teeth;

Jordan Peele and Sophia Coto, surrounded by Parker Steven Jackson's alien doll.

PHOTOS: GLEN WILSON/UNIVERSAL PICTURES



Capturing the uncanny: Peele and cinematographer Hoyte Van Hoytema.

lots of folds and wrinkles and slime; things that, to me, look more like they belong on a metal album cover or comic books. I wanted to bring things to a much more naturalistic and minimalist kind of place. Trying to say more with a whisper than a shout." Parker's designs also found their way into other places in the film, helping to create a unified aesthetic and reality.

The artist considers it a career milestone. "I was already a huge fan of Jordan and his work, and we bonded immediately over similar influences and tastes. It never felt like I was turning in designs to a boss who then tears down everything I like about it and sent me back to the drawing board. It was honestly one of the best creative experiences I've ever had in ten-plus years as a professional artist and really felt like I was contributing part of myself to his already amazing script and vision."

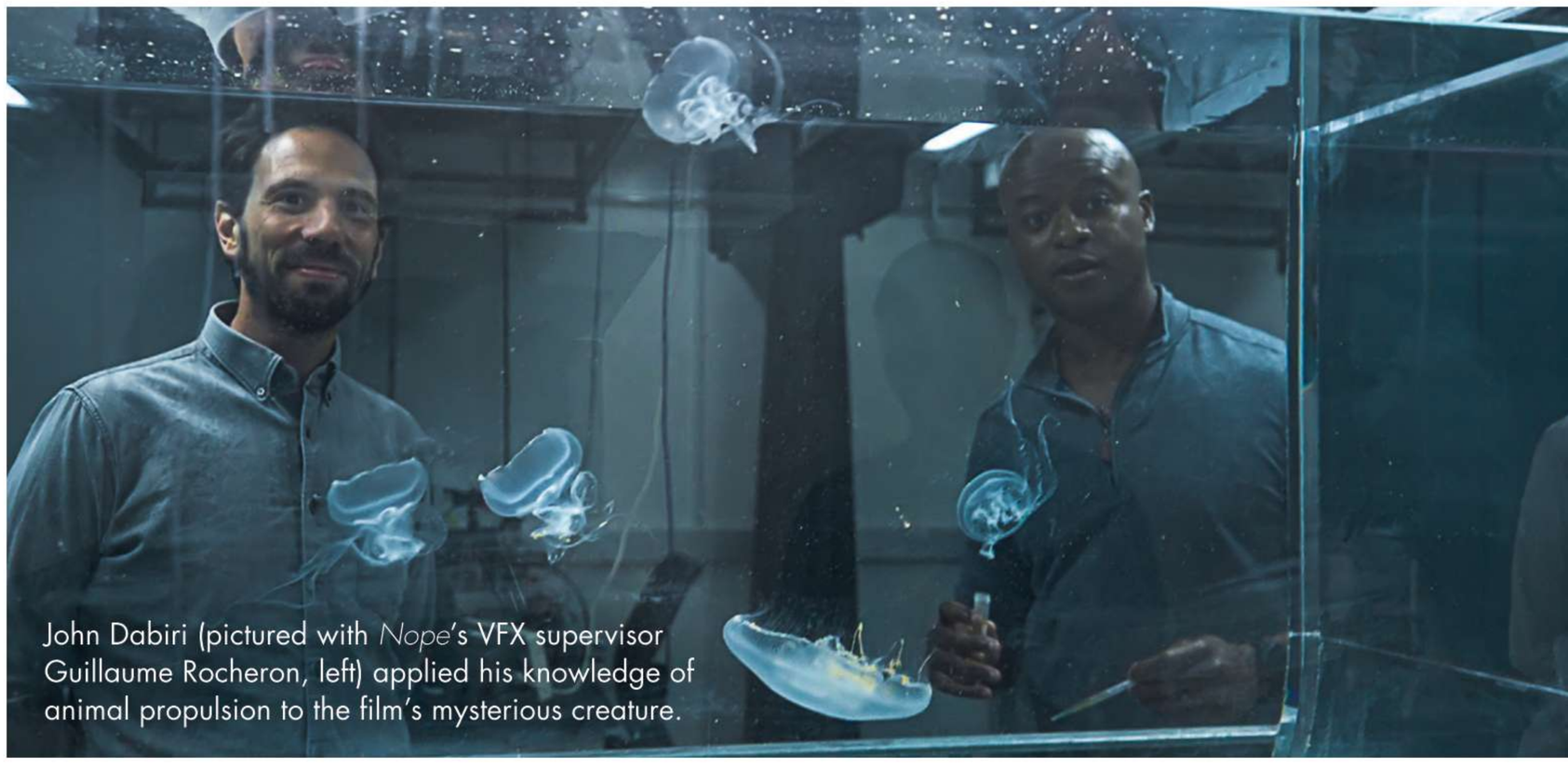
That gut feeling of seeing something that shouldn't exist, no matter how outlandish, must have a foothold in reality to succeed. Adhering to certain laws of physics and biology is essential, so Peele and the Monkeypaw team cannily tapped two scientists to make sure that when the big reveal of *Nope* happens, it's never anything less than plausible.

John Dabiri has been approached by Hollywood before, but "I have never been interested in participating," Dabiri confesses. "But I really liked Jordan's earlier work, and frankly I couldn't pass up the opportunity to support a Black filmmaker leading a genre in which there aren't many." As Centennial Professor of Aeronautics and Mechanical Engineering at the California Institute of Technology (CalTech), Dabiri studies the physics of animal swimming and flying, with "a long-standing focus on some of nature's most unusual creatures, such as jellyfish." Dabiri's role on *Nope* was to vet the reality of the creature revealed in the film. "I was focused on making sure that if one of my students saw the movie, there wouldn't be moments where they'd say, 'Well, that obviously violates the laws of physics.' I wanted the creature to be unlikely, but not impossible."

As Peele and his team presented him with their ideas and designs, Dabiri would weigh in on them, based on what exists in nature. "Jordan was keen to make sure that even though the movie is sci-fi, the science behind the creature should still be plausible. So I read the script from that perspective, thinking of ways in which the creature might be able to do all of things described in the story," says Dabiri. "Jordan's creativity overlapped with some of the creative design solutions that already exist in the ocean, in terms of how a creature might move, feed, etc." Dabiri says

THAT GUT FEELING OF SEEING SOMETHING THAT SHOULDN'T EXIST, NO MATTER HOW OUTLANDISH, MUST HAVE A FOOTHOLD IN REALITY TO SUCCEED.

Nope revisits Hollywood through a new lens.



John Dabiri (pictured with *Nope*'s VFX supervisor Guillaume Rocheron, left) applied his knowledge of animal propulsion to the film's mysterious creature.

that, far from looking for a tacit thumbs-up from him, the team waved in his contributions. "I expected he would come with lots of creative ideas, which he did. But he also frequently asked for input on what science might allow for a certain scene to happen. On one occasion, it was clear that the creature was moving so fast that we should expect some additional aerodynamics to come into play (like shockwaves and sonic booms when you move faster than the speed of sound), and Jordan immediately had a bunch of creative ideas for how to incorporate those physics in a way that could add to the ominous nature of the creature."

Dabiri enjoyed the challenge of making something fantastical beholden to the laws of nature. "Although the creature lives in the sky, it has a lot of commonalities with attributes of various marine species, e.g. how it moves stealthily but can dart away; how it uses the surrounding air (or water, in the case of marine species) to pull in prey; even the ability to use electromagnetic fields. So we worked on how to make those features consistent with the allowable physics."

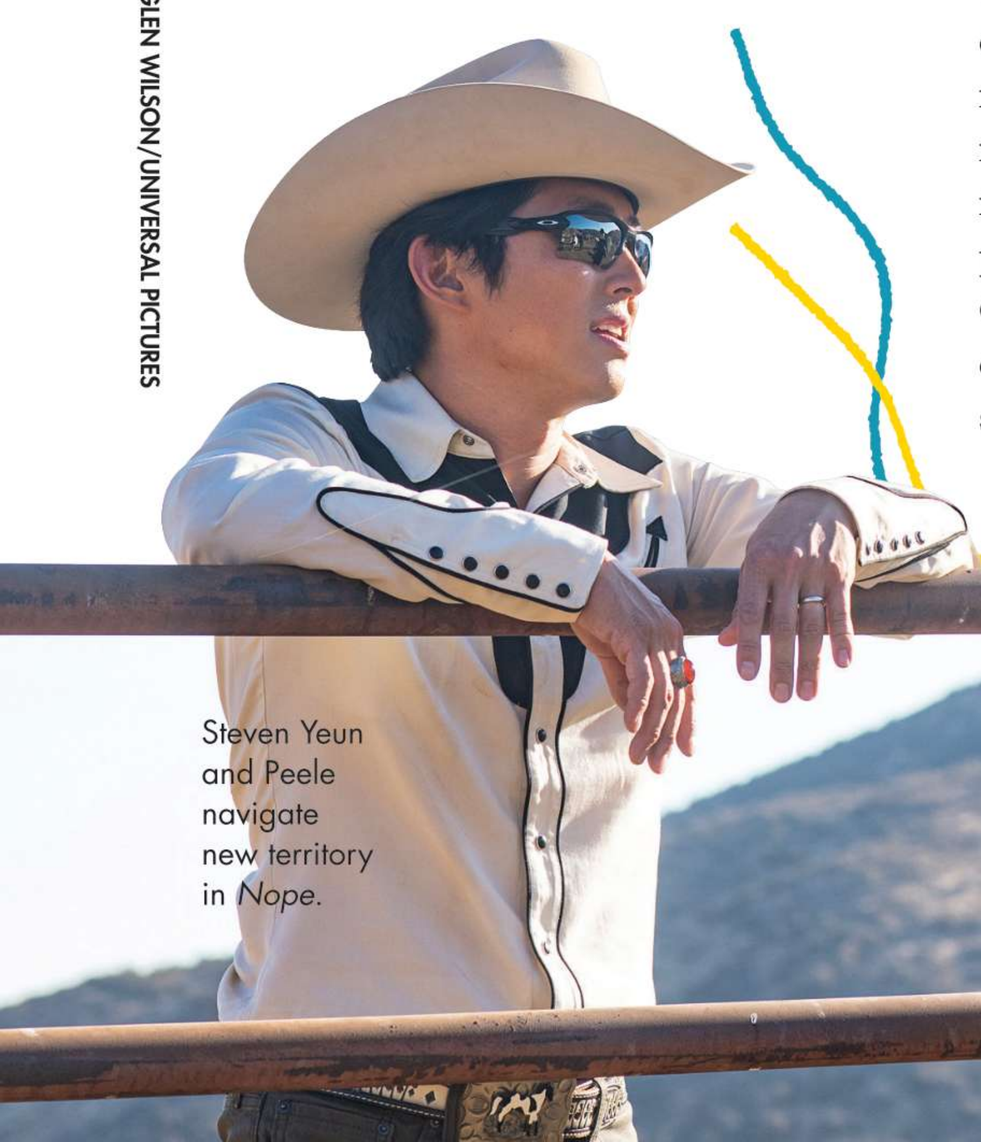
Keeping the creature afloat was, scientifically speaking, a hurdle. "The hardest part was probably the fact that marine organisms can float, since their bodies are approximately the same density as the surrounding water; we had to think creatively about how our organism could stay aloft in the air," Dabiri says. "We envisioned a combination of air currents and the electromagnetic effects allowing for this to be possible. The air currents help in the same way that some birds can soar for long periods without flapping. A group at MIT recently showed that an airplane can stay aloft just by using electromagnetic fields to manipulate the surrounding air. Since our creature already had a strong electromagnetic feature (which becomes apparent in the electronics when it comes close), that made sense as a mechanism to keep the creature aloft."

Although the revelation of this creature's existence puts *Nope* in "monster movie" category, Dabiri is gratified that the film is not so reductive about its creature. "There's not a sense that the creature is intentionally evil or hell-bent on destroying the earth, which is often a cliché in movies about a creature from another planet. In fact, I think it's that uncertainty about the creature's motivations, outside of its own survival, that makes it so interesting (and scarily unpredictable)," Dabiri offers. "In that sense, the creature in this movie has a lot in common with many undiscovered creatures in our own ocean. It's easy to create a narrative of fear around strange-looking animals in the ocean, but they each have a unique history worth understanding and appreciating."

With the creature designed and vetted, it was now up to Kelsi Rutledge to make sure it passed muster from her point of view. Rutledge not only has a Masters of Science in biology that specializes in morphology (animal form and shape), taxonomy (the field of naming new species), and systematics (the study of relationships and the classification of species), she has literally discovered a new species: a kind of ray called a guitarfish. Clearly, when it came to depicting a new form of life in *Nope*, Peele & Co. went to the right person. "I was approached by Ian Cooper to specifically describe the creature as if it was a new species to science," which Rutledge explains was no small ask. "I replicated the entire scientific process of describing this fictional creature with the same accuracy and level of detail as I would do for a real animal. This included an extensive literature search, a complete morphometric analysis, and a detailed description of the creature culminating in the creation of a complete and exhaustive scientific manuscript, as one would do for publication in a real scientific journal."

This level of verisimilitude is next-level, and key to selling the aberrant reality of the film. "I came up with the Latin names for the new creature following the rules of biological nomenclature. I also wrote the entire manuscript for describing the new creature, which included citing real published scientific literature, taking digital measurements of the creature, and following all the scientific protocols for writing a manuscript that would then be sent to be peer-reviewed by the scientific community." The exhaustive waterproofing of this new species by Peele and his crew impressed Rutledge. "I am not aware of any other movies that have written up an entire scientific manuscript for debuting a fictional creature."

On screen, the above contributions might speed past the viewer, or might not even be apparent. But these disparate talents and skill sets are crucial to – and a testament to Monkeypaw's commitment to – getting *Nope*'s "wrong" right. 💀



Steven Yeun and Peele navigate new territory in *Nope*.

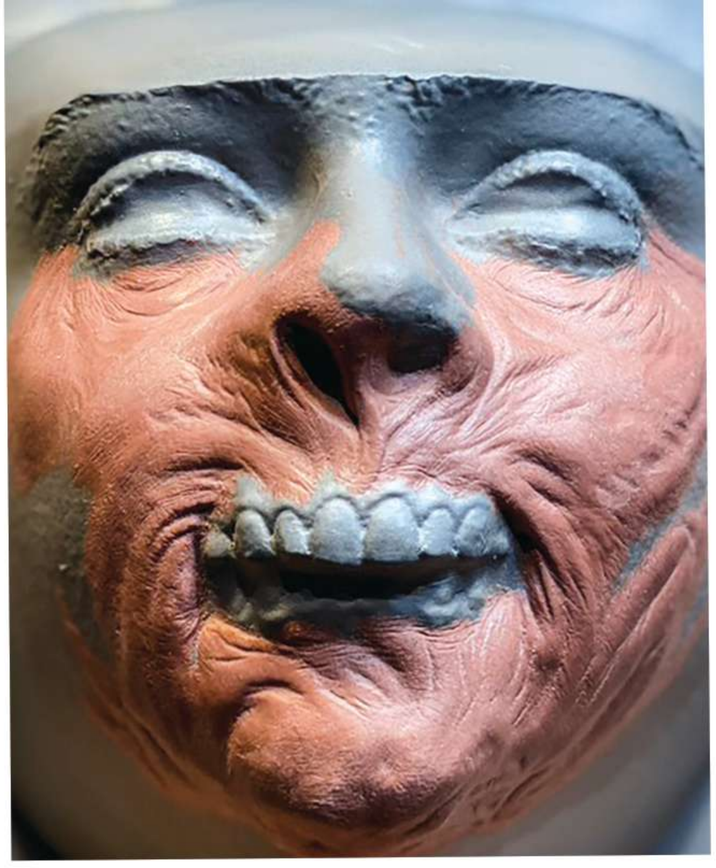
PHOTOS (LEFT PAGE TOP + CENTER) GLEN WILSON/UNIVERSAL PICTURES / (BOTTOM) UNIVERSAL PICTURES / (RIGHT PAGE) GLEN WILSON/UNIVERSAL PICTURES

HORROR SPECIAL

BY CHRISTOPHER NELSON

DELVING INTO THE GRUESOME AFTERMATH OF *NOPE*'S SHOW-STOPPING CHIMP ATTACK.

Face Off: Sophia Coto's Mary Jo Elliott in design and test makeup stages.



Vincent Van Dyke is a rare special makeup FX artist these days. He's an excellent collaborator who maintains an original and fresh conceptual take on FX and design. I should know; I've done a few projects (*Halloween Kills*; ever heard of it?) with Van Dyke and his lab of talented artists and technicians at VVDFX.

I learned this was certainly his approach when I sat down with him recently to talk about his contributions to Jordan Peele's new feature, *Nope*. Creepy case in point, a beautiful yet disturbing prosthetic makeup on actress Sophia Coto, whose character falls victim to a violent attack from a "face ripper monkey." (Yes, I know a chimp is not a monkey, but I've always wanted to write those words. Is there a band with that name yet?)

Van Dyke's involvement in *Nope* started when Makeup Department Head Tym Buacharern "reached out regarding a few looks for the film. In particular a young girl who is attacked by a chimp and is left permanently scarred for the rest of her life, both physically and mentally."

Her aftermath is revealed years after the mutilation, and this is where Van Dyke steps in. "Our parameters started simply. Her face from the eyes up were to remain normal and beautiful to retain her humanity. We didn't want to take character away from the actress' expressive eyes. But then, as we pan down, her face is badly scarred. Jordan definitely wanted her to have no lips as well. We also knew she had to have some type of scarring, not only as a result of the attack, but also from years of skin grafting, etc."

VVDFX started with a 3D scan of Coto's head, a newer technology that has advanced to the point that the days of traditional lifecasting with "straws up actors' noses to breathe" are quickly becoming history. (Note: I've NEVER put straws up anyone's nose in over 33 years of lifecasting. Who does that? Oh, actors...) This new way of capturing an actor's features allows an artist to retain the exact definition, form, and texture of a specific person. It also allows us to have the eyes open in the casting, giving better registration for subtle prosthetic appliances.

During this session, they also made a dental cast, as Van Dyke knew he wanted to do an out-of-the-mouth set of teeth. "I've always wanted to do a makeup/set of dentures that seamlessly blended skin and scar tissue into gums. So often, we've seen a horrific and gross separation of flesh and teeth. I wanted this to be different. A creepy and clean transition that I've always found so interesting."

But the new technique came with its own challenges. "The issue with that is you're basically locking her in to the makeup, seamlessly gluing and blending her facial appliance to her dentures," Van Dyke continues. This can make it difficult for an actor to speak, drink, and eat. But to the artist's delight, "When Sophia came into the shop, I pitched the idea and she was all for it, and game for anything."

To achieve that "seamlessness," Coto's teeth were made first by artist Jason James at VVDFX. She then returned to the shop and had another head scan done while wearing the dentures. "The teeth were super comfortable for her, drool and all," Van Dyke laughs. "She was a great sport."

Vince started preliminary digital designs, while Coto's new scan with the teeth, done by Daniele Tirinnanzi, was being 3D printed by tech Cody Wilkins,

PHOTOS COURTESY OF VINCENT VAN DYKE

and positives cast by mold maker Carl Lyon. It was an approach none of them had done before.

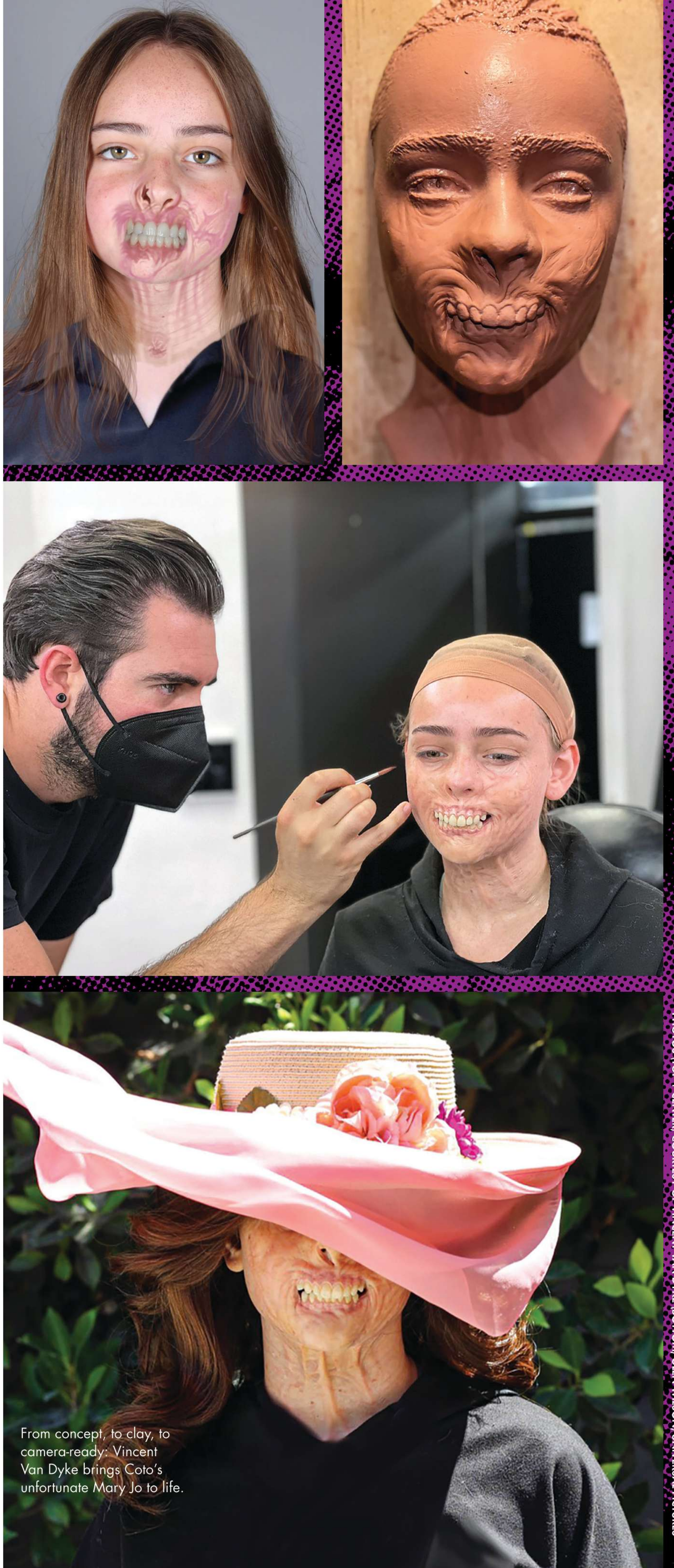
Vince sculpted the designed makeup, then had Coto return for a test makeup once the silicone prosthetics were cast by artist Will Thornton. “I was persistent about the makeup being seamless, and was concerned with how Sophia would feel about being locked into the makeup. That said, if we had to take the teeth out, we could. But she was great and didn’t require that at all. I was super impressed by her resilience and attitude as she went about her day with no problem. Talking, eating, drinking…” — and drooling.

Nope proved to be a successful testing ground for the new 3D scan and printing technique of creating makeups, as VVDFX also handled a subtle aging makeup on the “Nobody” character, as well as a makeup on genre legend Keith David (*The Thing*, *They Live*).

Peele’s main idea for the character was that the look had to be impactful. To achieve that impact, every good makeup needs the right context and setting, and it was here where makeup, hair AND wardrobe came together to achieve that moment.

“In the test makeup, we landed on how to portray the reveal with the hat and the veil. The veil became its own character as part of the makeup. It allowed us to use our imagination, while revealing something horrific in an appealing and beautiful way,” Van Dyke enthuses. “I give credit to the costume department for that as well. It was a collective thought between myself, Jordan, Tym, and the costume department: the first time we see this character, this face is best revealed within the veil’s material, its folds as it blows in the wind, the distance between the hat brim, between the veil and face. All these details.” Add a mini leaf blower to get the veil moving, and you’ve got yourself some cinema.

I asked Van Dyke how it was collaborating with director Jordan Peele. “It was great. He has a very clear vision. Usually, the trouble is when you deal with someone who doesn’t know what they want until they see it. Jordan doesn’t have that. He’s specific as to what he wants to see and what the look is.” 💀



From concept, to clay, to camera-ready: Vincent Van Dyke brings Coto’s unfortunate Mary Jo to life.

PHOTOS (TOP + CENTER) COURTESY OF VINCENT VAN DYKE (BOTTOM) GLEN WILSON/UNIVERSAL PICTURES

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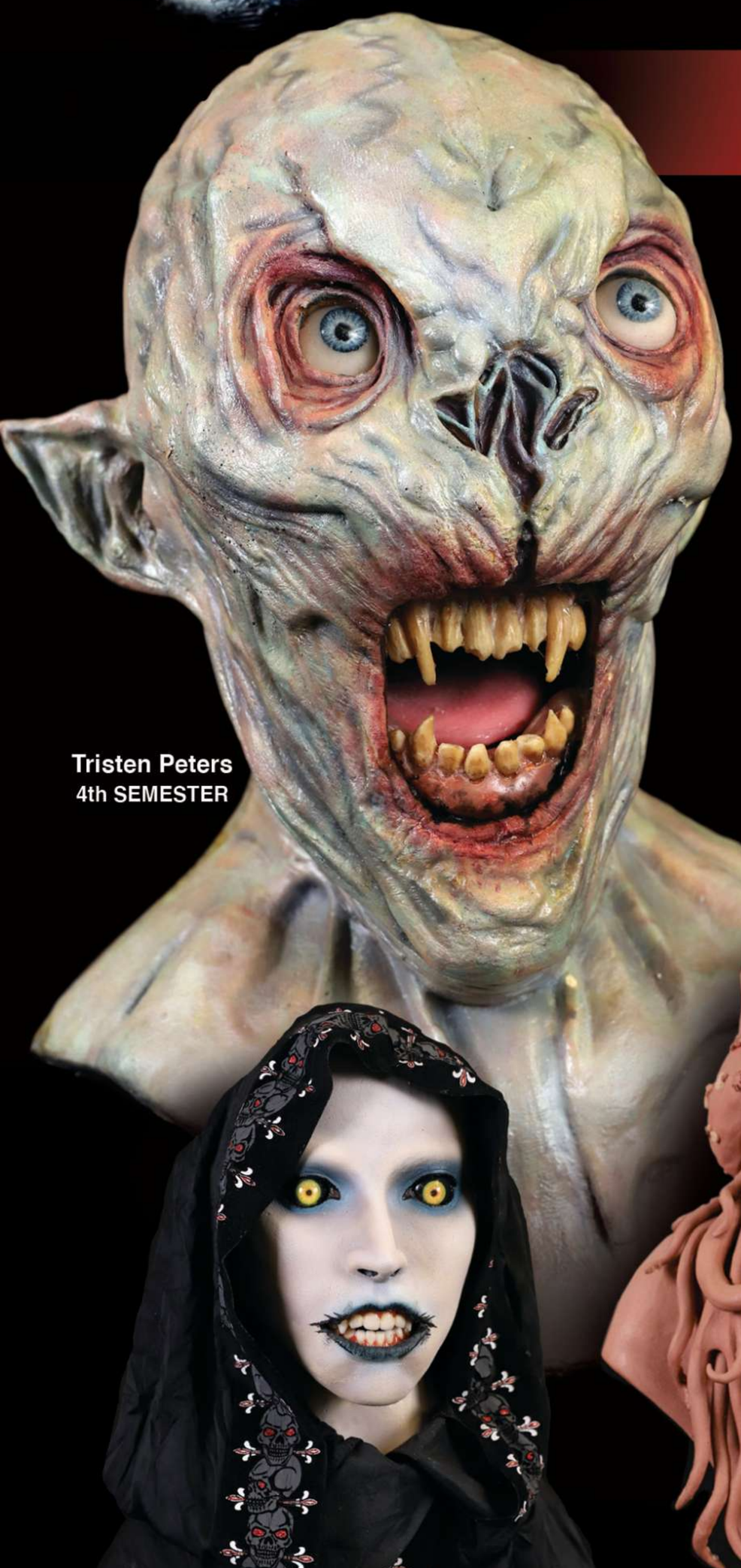

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BAD MIRACLES AND MASKS OF GOD

HORROR'S LINK BETWEEN THEOLOGY AND ALIENS

BY RICHARD NEWBY

Since we first started projecting stories onto screens, and even earlier, we've tried to give form to what's out there, hiding, watching, waiting to make contact. Horror is filled with little dark spaces, haunted rooms and crowded corners that crouch beneath the umbrella of the supernatural. But there's also that great big darkness, the one that hangs over everything and challenges us with its enormity. In that darkness it's not ghosts and ghouls we have to grapple with, but how small we are in the cosmos. Small but not alone... at least, I don't believe we are.

Be it the wrath of gods or little green men, movies have gone a long way in creating the images we hold for what a greater intelligence may look like. When looked at individually, the higher powers provide, even in their most nightmarish forms, an illusionary sense of comfort and control, and make the unknowable knowable. Whether the Roswell Greys, or the Archangel Michael in the form of John Travolta, there is at the very least a palatability that we can handle and comprehend. But when taken together, should we engage on any serious level with the theory that God is an ancient astronaut, that comfort and comprehension quickly dissipates. From that point we enter the arena of the strange, and are put off by the way such a theory pokes holes in our convictions, purpose, and dearly held beliefs about our place in the universe. Not to go all *Starlog*, but horror/sci-fi films have furthered the intersection between religion, folklore, and the theory of extraterrestrial life. And with it proven few things more frightening than being confronted with our faith, our history, and realizing, as Elizabeth Shaw (Noomi Rapace) did in Ridley Scott's *Prometheus*, "We were wrong. We were so wrong."

"What's a bad miracle? They got a word for that?" James Haywood's (Daniel Kaluuya) questions have ping ponged inside my skull since the first time I heard them in the teaser trailer for Peele's latest, *Nope*. The word "miracle," by its inclusion, suggests faith, a belief in the goodness of a higher power. But a bad miracle? It's not something as simple as being the opposite of a miracle, a curse, which is ever-prevalent in our horror stories. Rather, a bad miracle suggests that something wonderful and awful is happening simultaneously – a sublime and layered recompence that is perhaps an answer to a prayer by something other than the entity you believed you were praying to. What that inevitably means for *Nope*, which in its closely guarded secrecy has hinted at aliens, will have to wait a few more weeks to be fully revealed. And if you're reading this at some future point, after having seen the movie and it wasn't aliens, I apologize and hope at the very least you'll be amused by this galaxy-brained endeavor. But from my outsider's perch of not having seen the film, it feels like Peele is grappling with something grand, and connected to the very means through which we share our most wide-reaching stories in an effort to understand the universe.

Like Ridley Scott, Jordan Peele appears keen on exploring extraterrestrial life through, at least in part, the lens of history. In *Nope*, it seems that history makes up the very foundations of moviemaking, a suggestive art form through which we draw subjective meaning, not unlike the ancient cave drawings Shaw discovers in *Prometheus*, the star map she believes is an invitation rather than a warning. *Nope*'s "cave drawing" is a revisionist depiction of what is considered by scholars to be the first motion picture made, Eadweard Muybridge's *The Horse in Motion* (1878). In Peele's film, the rider is not Muybridge but a Black man, one of Haywood's ancestors, which raises its own, perhaps separate, questions about history in the film, and alien visitors' genetic interests. Regardless, the leap in technology from Muybridge's three seconds' worth of footage to narrative filmmaking led to some of the earliest genre films, stories about God, Satan, and aliens – George Melies' *The House of the Devil* (1896), *A Trip to the Moon* (1902), and Sidney Olcott's *From the Manger to the Cross* (1912).

It shouldn't be a surprise then that when the Golden Age of Hollywood really hit its stride in the '50s, titles like *The Thing From Another World* (1951), *The Robe* (1953), *The War of the Worlds* (1953), *It Came From Outer Space* (1953), *This Island Earth* (1955), *The Ten Commandments* (1956), and *Ben-Hur* (1959) dominated multiplexes. In the midst of Cold War fears we had heaven and UFOS on our minds, destruction and salvation. The following decade and the move towards New Hollywood filmmaking rocked cinematic interests. The cover of *Time* magazine in April 1966 infamously asked "Is God Dead?" and in 1968 Erich von Daniken wrote *Chariots of the Gods?*, which theorized that the history of the world, its religions and

New gods: *Prometheus* (left), *The Thing From Another World* (top), *This Island Earth* (bottom).

technological advancements, were the result of aliens that early civilizations viewed as gods. In response to the questions posed by these writings, the decline of Biblical epics and sci-fi B-movies, and the tumultuous political landscape and Civil Rights movement, American filmmakers brought the Devil out to play. *Rosemary's Baby* (1968), *The Exorcist* (1973), *Don't Look Now* (1973), and *The Omen* (1976) all had a point to make through these tales of Satan's children, demonic possession, and the literal and figurative failure to restore the church: these were godless times.

When God returned, he'd come from space. While Jack Kirby's comic series, *The Eternals* (1976), and Richard Donner's *Superman* (1978), his sunny-sided reflection of *The Omen*, found hope in von Daniken's theories, horror emerged from that wellspring, too, and Larry Cohen was at the forefront. Though never discussed alongside the most famous filmmakers of that era, Cohen was one of America's most important, and – through Blaxploitation films, social-minded horror and humor – he is arguably one of the most comparable precursors to Peele, which makes his best film an interesting conversation piece alongside the theories surrounding *Nope*. In *God Told Me To* (1976), devout Catholic police detective Peter J. Nicholas (Tony Lo Bianco) is investigating a seemingly random series of murders in NYC, all committed by different individuals who when asked for a motive all utter the same chilling titular line: "God told me to."

Nicholas' investigation leads him to Bernard Phillips (Richard Lynch), an angelic and androgynous golden being of immense power who believes himself to be a god. As it turns out, Bernard is the result of a human woman's alien abduction and impregnation, a human-alien hybrid. The kicker is (spoiler) that Nicholas is, too, Bernard's brother who has yet to tap into his psychic abilities. "The history books are full of virgin births. Who were Moses and Jesus really? Our ancestors," Bernard tells Nicholas. It's not simply that Earth's messiahs were alien hybrids that shakes Nicholas to

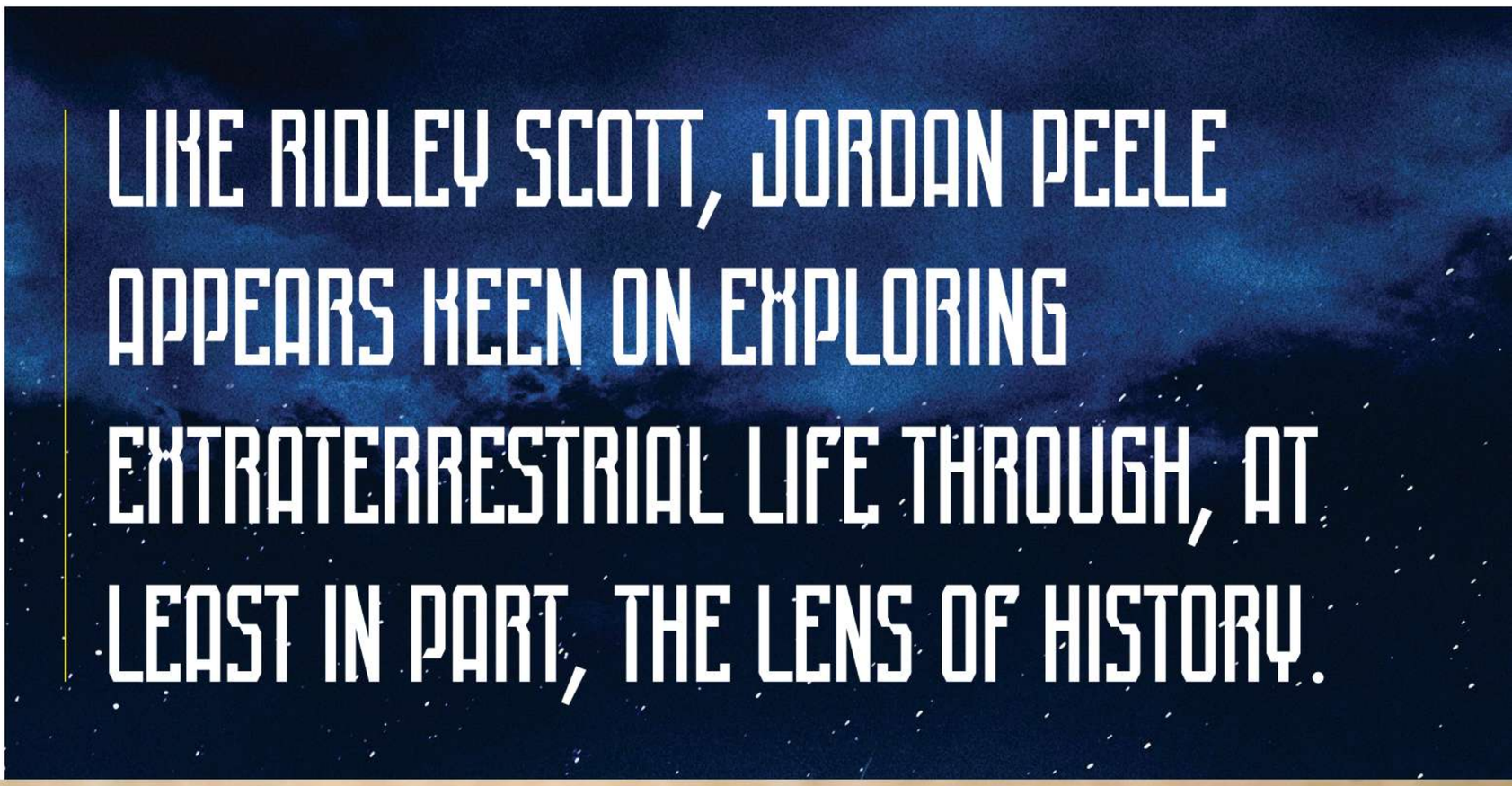
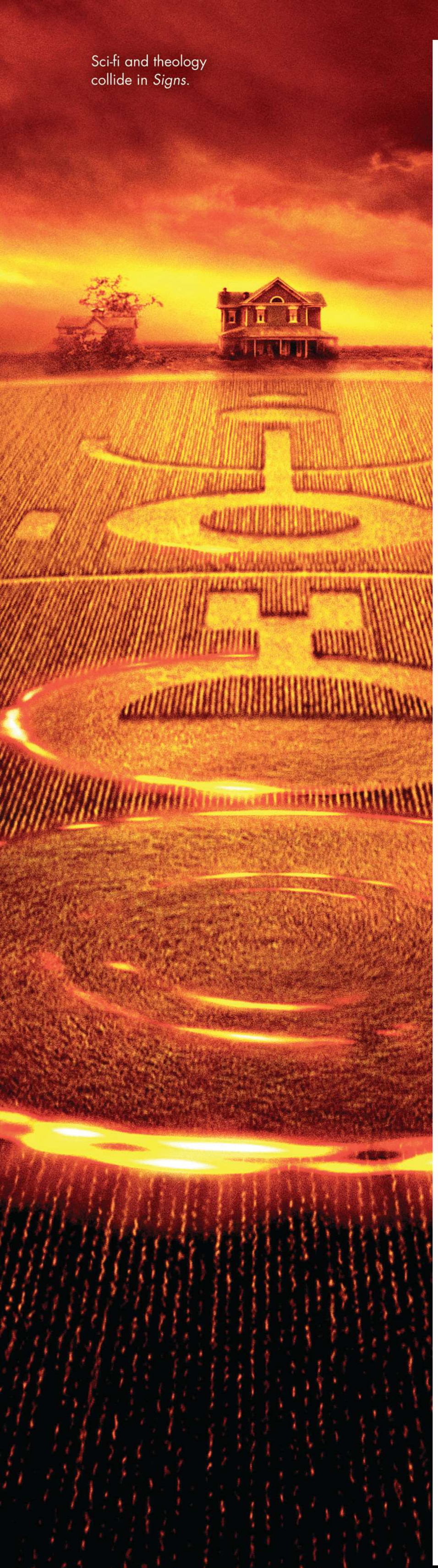

LIKE RIDLEY SCOTT, JORDAN PEELE APPEARS KEEN ON EXPLORING EXTRATERRESTRIAL LIFE THROUGH, AT LEAST IN PART, THE LENS OF HISTORY.

PHOTO: GLEN WILSON/UNIVERSAL PICTURES



Sci-fi and theology collide in *Signs*.

his core, but that human beings, whom he believed were created in the image of God, are simply cattle to be killed off or bred in order to create a new species. "Sacrifices to your god are nothing new. Why are you looking at me like I'm the first? Life doesn't matter, not on this Earth," one of Phillips' disciples proclaims prior to the revelation about Nicholas' real identity. While the film was panned upon release, it remains one of the most horrific films of the '70s because of how utterly and completely it destroys the faith of the most faithful. Near the film's end Nicholas says, "All my life I felt so close to God... and it wasn't Him after all." Nicholas' feeling of being chosen, or being special was right, just not in the way he imagined, and that is nothing if not a bad miracle.

The concept of specific human beings being chosen by alien visitors for a higher purpose would come into play again in Philippe Mora's aptly titled *Communion* (1989), loosely based on Whitley Strieber's book of the same name and which catalogued his own claims of alien abduction. Naturally, the explosion of *Star Wars* (1977) and success of *Alien* (1979) made aliens commonplace again and New Hollywood had been overrun by the age of blockbusters and franchises, with horror becoming even more diversified and tackling just about any subject under the sun. Within that space *Communion* is little more than footnote, a negatively reviewed box office flop with an absolutely unhinged Christopher Walken in a bad way after an alien abduction and anal probing. But there's something deeper and more meaningful there, too (in the film, not the probing). Walken, who plays a fictionalized version of Strieber, has his first alien encounter the day after Christmas, immediately linking the association with the Christian God and aliens – something *Prometheus*, set around the holiday, does as well. Though Strieber's wife, Anne (Lindsay Crouse) and psychologist, Dr. Duffy (Frances Sternhagen), initially believe he's gone crazy – a result of stress from trying to write his latest novel, perhaps – his young son, Andrew (Joel Carlson) has a similar experience forcing him to question his developing faith. "Mommy, is God real?" he asks. "I think so. I hope so," she replies. This prompts Andrew to say, "But nobody knows for sure... so we're all alone except for the little blue doctors? I prayed for them to go away but they just kept shining their lights on me. God didn't make them go way."

The aliens in *Communion* come in many forms, little blue men, classic Greys, and insect-esque creatures. And yet, unlike the unseen puppet masters in *God Told Me To*, their intentions are never clear, only that they've selected certain bloodlines to interact and share communion with. Interestingly, these selected individuals are all white, which... I don't know, you tell me! Is there an aspect of human appearance that has created some unintentional subtext, or is it simply a result of casting choices at the time? On the matter of constructed identities, even the appearance of these aliens is drawn into question, with the Grey alien archetype existing as a spacesuit, hiding something unseen. Strieber describes these various lifeforms as a "puzzle box," something his mind can't perceive or fully comprehend or look at directly, like the Seraphim or the Burning Bush. Anne ultimately concludes that his experience was a spiritual one, saying: "I don't know what you saw. It's just God. You saw something extraordinary; there are many faces of God. Masks of God." There is a note of hope at the end of the film that stands in contrast to the horror Strieber experienced aboard the UFO. While the abduction scenes never reach the levels of terror that *Fire in the Sky* (1993) would, these aliens never seem entirely benevolent, yet their actions are attributed to our existence. "Our history is a response to their presence. They may be the face of what evolution looks like when it responds to a conscious mind," Strieber says in the end, begging the question of a God beyond these gods, what evolution requires following such a meeting, and seeing what we're supposedly never meant to see.

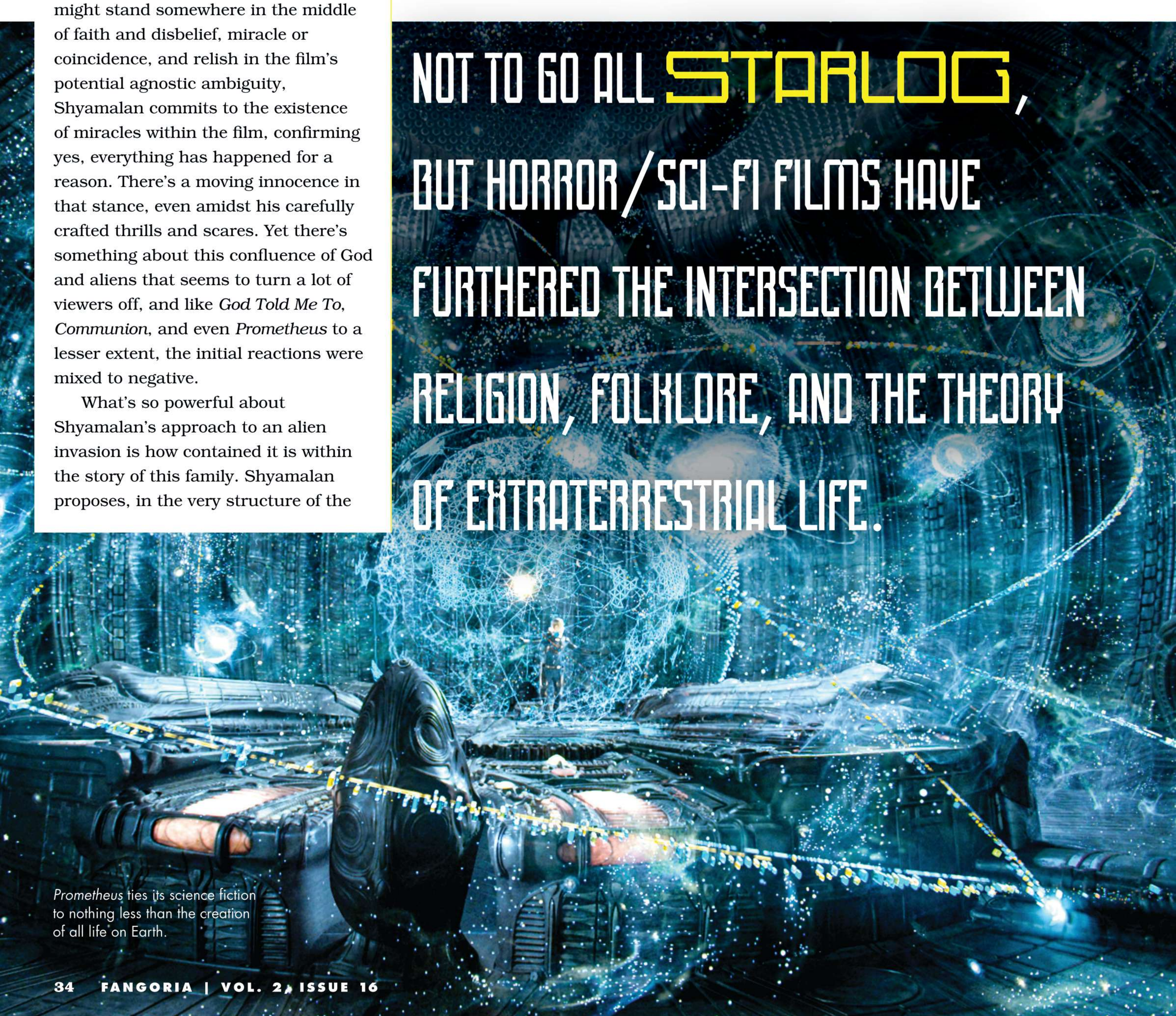
The most popular consideration of aliens in the context of religion, a film that *Nope*'s teaser was immediately compared to in its mystique, is M. Night Shyamalan's *Signs* (2002), which has a different agenda than the aforementioned films. While the aliens in this film aren't synonymous with God, their arrival forces disillusioned

pastor Graham Hess (Mel Gibson), his brother Merrill (Joaquin Phoenix), and two children, Morgan (Rory Culkin) and Bo (Abagail Breslin), to find their faith again in the aftermath of a family tragedy. When the crop circles first appear in Hess' cornfield, Bo says, "I think God did it." Her faith has not been as damaged as the rest of her family by the loss of her mother; she sees the crop circles as signs, confirming the existence of a higher power. She is, as her father later explains to Merrill in the film's most memorable monologue, "Looking at a miracle…feel[s] like whatever's going to happen, there will be someone there to help them." When Merrill asks him what he believes, Graham says, "There is no one watching out for us, Merrill. We're all on our own."

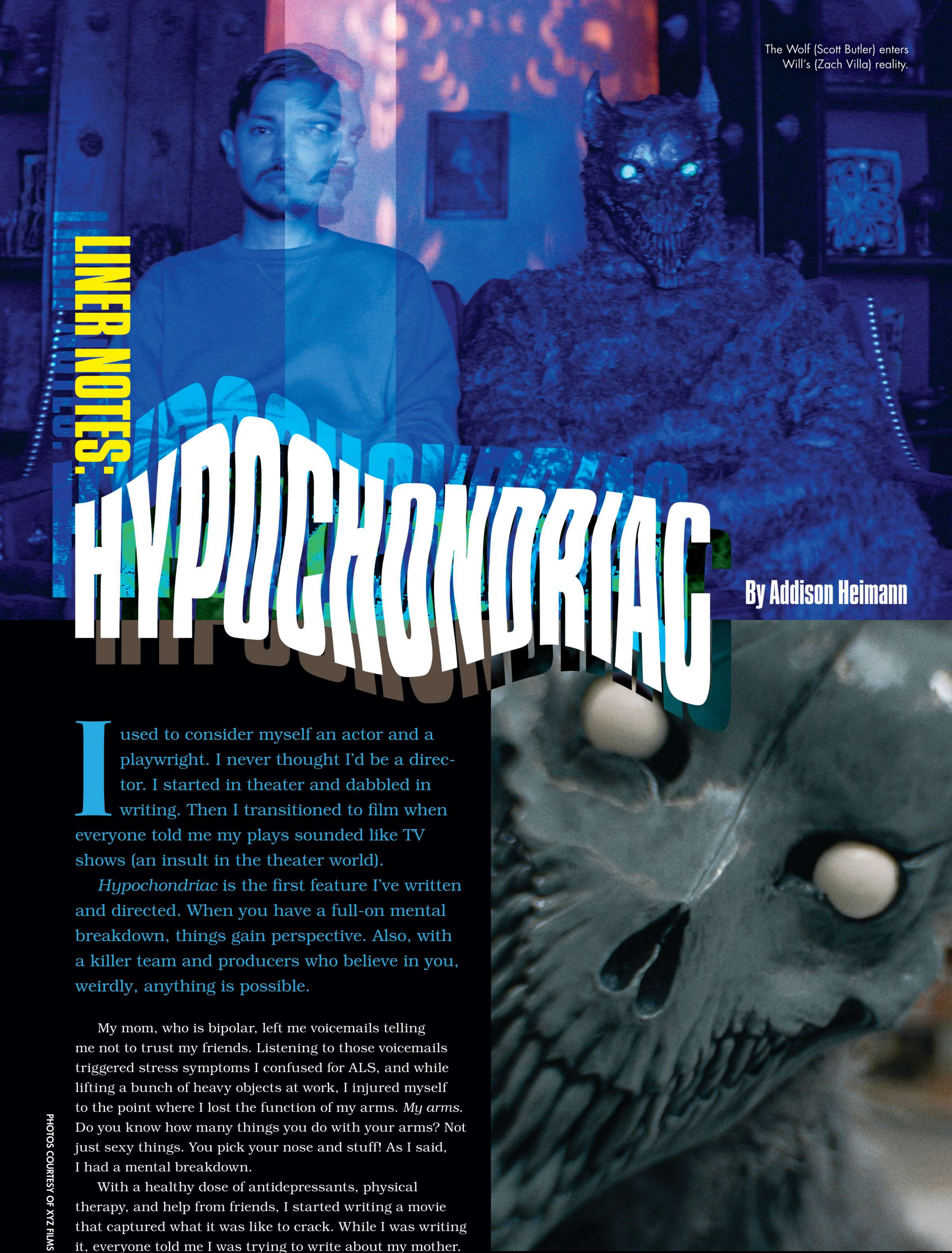
While a less brave filmmaker might stand somewhere in the middle of faith and disbelief, miracle or coincidence, and relish in the film's potential agnostic ambiguity, Shyamalan commits to the existence of miracles within the film, confirming yes, everything has happened for a reason. There's a moving innocence in that stance, even amidst his carefully crafted thrills and scares. Yet there's something about this confluence of God and aliens that seems to turn a lot of viewers off, and like *God Told Me To*, *Communion*, and even *Prometheus* to a lesser extent, the initial reactions were mixed to negative.

What's so powerful about Shyamalan's approach to an alien invasion is how contained it is within the story of this family. Shyamalan proposes, in the very structure of the film, that this invasion, this act of God, is about the Hess family and Graham finding his faith again. The world is moved by God for the benefit of this one family in terms of the lens through which we experience it, and – to borrow a line from Shyamalan's subsequent film, *The Village* (2004) – "the world moves for love." In her dying moments, Graham's wife was granted some cosmic comprehension, became a witness for things yet unfold, the prophet of God. Her death essentially becomes a bad miracle, and her mysterious command of "Swing away" is an invitation for the Hess family to swing back towards God, for their faith to be validated, and to feel, despite the horrors they've endured, "We were so right."

Are these cinematic stories of abductions and visitations ultimately efforts in captivity or transcendence? Are we clinging to belief systems and trapped within them, or are we reaching for some greater understanding of our existence? Whatever the case, the history of genre filmmaking is a history of the evolution of our faith, our need for it, our fear of it, and desire to predict the answers. It has, perhaps, delivered some sense of understanding, but at the same time has remained a divisive exploration and perhaps left us unprepared for a reality that awaits above the clouds, be it those in *Nope* or those above our very heads. Jordan Peele has forced us to confront our race relations and ourselves. If God in the guise of aliens is the next concept he gives form to, I have little doubt it will be a confrontational revelation that makes the ever-expanding darkness above just a bit blacker. 💀


NOT TO GO ALL STARLOG,
BUT HORROR/SCI-FI FILMS HAVE
FURTHERED THE INTERSECTION BETWEEN
RELIGION, FOLKLORE, AND THE THEORY
OF EXTRATERRESTRIAL LIFE.

Prometheus ties its science fiction to nothing less than the creation of all life on Earth.



The Wolf (Scott Butler) enters Will's (Zach Villa) reality.

LINER NOTES.

HYPOCHONDRIAC

By Addison Heimann

I used to consider myself an actor and a playwright. I never thought I'd be a director. I started in theater and dabbled in writing. Then I transitioned to film when everyone told me my plays sounded like TV shows (an insult in the theater world).

Hypochondriac is the first feature I've written and directed. When you have a full-on mental breakdown, things gain perspective. Also, with a killer team and producers who believe in you, weirdly, anything is possible.

My mom, who is bipolar, left me voicemails telling me not to trust my friends. Listening to those voicemails triggered stress symptoms I confused for ALS, and while lifting a bunch of heavy objects at work, I injured myself to the point where I lost the function of my arms. *My arms.* Do you know how many things you do with your arms? Not just sexy things. You pick your nose and stuff! As I said, I had a mental breakdown.

With a healthy dose of antidepressants, physical therapy, and help from friends, I started writing a movie that captured what it was like to crack. While I was writing it, everyone told me I was trying to write about my mother.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF XYZ FILMS

It was not about that at first, but it led to a man in a wolf costume. It's something we all experience — a creature, or our inner child, in the shadows, trying to get our attention. The more we ignore it, the more grotesque it becomes. The more we sideline our trauma, the more it infects our daily lives, to the point of destruction.

Hilariously, we shot this movie during the pandemic, which means the most stressful time on set for this hypochondriac was the thirty minutes of COVID testing each morning. But the thing about having to wait a year and a half to get vaccines so we could shoot *Hypochondriac* is that I knew what I was doing by the time I got on set. I made decisions when asked and was kind, which made for an incredible experience all around. (Hopefully my crew thought I was nice. If you ask them and they say no, don't tell me.) The team was so unbelievably willing to throw themselves into this story, even while exploring the darker areas of my mind.

I'm grateful for my incredible cast. Zach Villa, our lead, was the last to audition, and he was the one who took my breath away. When we met and discussed the film, it was clear that he understood who I was and what the role required. He knew what I needed from him — we communicated almost nonverbally. A look was all I needed to get my point across, and then he would step in frame and kill it. We also spoke words to each other. I'm not *that* good.

Villa, Devon Graye, Madeline Zima, Yumarie Morales, Chris Doubek, and Marlene Forte rounded out our leads, and I couldn't have asked for better collaborators. They understood the value of this movie: a queer horror movie about mental illness. Honestly, maybe they understood its importance more than I did.

Shades of *Donnie Darko*.

With a healthy dose of antidepressants, physical therapy, and help from friends, I started writing a movie that captured what it was like to crack.

Filmmaker Addison Heimann and 1st Assistant Director Lizzy Walker bring order to the chaos.

Things get messy when Will and the Wolf face off.

What's beautiful about our little movie is that it's funny, even though it's about my mental health. I swear, you will laugh at least once. I've seen it in theaters and can attest to this. But that's me, finding hilarity in pain (comedy equaling tragedy, plus time, yada yada). My most significant film reference for *Hypochondriac* is *Donnie Darko*. I love, more than anything, that in one movie, you have a substitute teacher obsessing over Sparkle Motion, Patrick Swayze doing the most, and then Donnie, crying with his mother, asking, "How does it feel to have a wacko for a son?" To which she replies, "It feels wonderful."

My favorite thing (which I stole from my assistant director) was asking everyone to take a deep breath before every take. It allowed us to focus and relax. It sucked us into the scene. If things were frustrating, if we were goofing around, if the air was tense — a simple breath was all it took to reset.

I tend to undercut compliments I get from anyone. Don't get me wrong, I love compliments. I prefer them to food. But when someone calls this film important, I'm like, "From me? This imposter? How dare you!" However, *Hypochondriac* made me feel less alone after writing it. Those who watched it in theaters have come up to me and said it helped them, too. So, you know what? Maybe I can take the compliment this time.

I want more movies like *Hypochondriac* because it's undeniably human. We sorely need more art like that.

Hypochondriac *is in theaters July 29 and VOD August 4.* 💀

PHOTOS COURTESY OF XYZ FILMS

SCARE PACKAGE

RAD CHAD'S REVENGE

BEHIND-THE-SCENES

Set Photos by Brian Nixon and Dan Berghofer

There are no rules in filmmaking. Only sins. And the cardinal sin is dullness.

– Frank Capra

People like to throw the term "love letter to horror" around so much, it's become clichéd. But what if someone *literally* wrote letters in school about their love of horror films? Surprising to no one, that was me circa 1995. And now in 2022, I've written something new.

With the help of many of my oldest and newest best friends, it is my absolute pleasure to present to you our over-the-top, gory tribute to the FANGORIAs of yesteryear. Coming soon to Shudder, here's just a taste of the gooey goodness we will be unleashing. And while I still don't know if this film is a "love letter," two things I know for certain: I loved making it, and it sure as hell isn't dull.

– *Aaron B. Koontz is the co-creator, producer and director of the core film in* Scare Package *and* Scare Package II: Rad Chad's Revenge.

SECRETING SOCIETIES AND MUTATION NATIONS

From *Crimes of the Future* (1970) to *Crimes of the Future* (2022), David Cronenberg's obsession with sociopolitical revolution has always sat alongside the body horror.

BY PHIL NOBILE JR.

PHOTO BY NIKOS NIKOLOPOULOS / ©SERENDIPITY POINT FILMS

Saul Tenser (Viggo Mortensen) in his OrchidBed, with Caprice (Léa Seydoux) looking on.

David Cronenberg's well-earned reputation as the master of "body horror" has always been a double-edged sword for the filmmaker. On the one hand, it's nice to have a brand, and it's even generated the man his own eponymous adjective. How many indie horror efforts have excitedly leaned into "Cronenbergian" in their press notes? Too many, is my guess. But on the other hand, when we default to using reductive and familiar bullet points to measure his films, we not only set ourselves up for disappointment with an unfair metric, we shortchange some of the equally resonant themes in Cronenberg's work.

Take his new film. *Crimes of the Future* presents a tomorrow in which pain and infection have vanished, while at the same time humans are inexplicably growing new organs. Cataloging all this new anatomy is the Department of Organ Registration, a sort of understaffed, mutation-centric HUAC that expects every good citizen to snitch on anyone rocking new body parts. In other corners of this world, where nothing hurts and it's impossible to get sick, a robust art scene has sprung up in which artists (among them Viggo Mortensen's Saul and Léa Seydoux's Caprice) cut each other open in ancient, tetanus-ridden performance spaces, removing their mysterious new organs for rapt audiences.

Yes, there is Cronenberg's trademark mutation and gore, including the performative desecration of a child's corpse which should net the movie its share of outrage responses. And yes, the visceral stuff ties this year's model to the filmmaker's earlier works in ways that are often surprisingly direct. But what's perhaps most exciting is the way that Cronenberg's fascination with human mutation continues to act as a springboard for his equally ongoing preoccupation with new world orders. In the midst of our very own real-life plague event, that aspect of Cronenberg's filmography may vibrate a little harder, and it shouldn't be surprising that *Crimes of the Future* puts that facet of the artist's work more front and center than ever.

But it's always been there.

Starting with the namesake of the director's new film, *Crimes of the Future* (1970) finds a society reshaped around a plague that has killed off all mature females. The film's protagonist, Adrian Tripod (Ron Mlodzik), moves through this strange new landscape looking for his missing mentor. His search takes him through a variety of institutions that will echo throughout Cronenberg's career: The House of Skin; Metaphysical Import-Export; the Oceanic Podiatry Group – as well as a group of rogue pedophiles attempting to save the world by inducing puberty into a young child before impregnating her. Right from the jump, Cronenberg's fascination with strange new bureaucracies and underground revolutions is at least as important as his affinity for body horror.

The relatively isolated infection of *Shivers*, Cronenberg's first commercial feature, nonetheless doubles as an apocalyptic societal event, as sex-crazed parasites infect the entire Starliner apartment complex and end credits roll on the smiling infected hosts, heading out into the world to fuck their way through the human race. It's a happy ending for the parasite; one wonders what sort of post-infection society will rise up out of the eventual, global post-orgasmic haze, and whether Cronenberg would have shown it to us had he the budget. The filmmaker goes a little bigger on his contagion horror in *Rabid*, but aside from the sketchy Keloid Clinic for Plastic Surgery responsible for Rose's (Marilyn Chambers) mutation into a bloodsucking killer, the film is relatively free of the director's societal and corporate preoccupations.

Cronenberg's nu-institutions start to blossom in *The Brood*: The Somafree Institute (you gotta love the names), run by Oliver Reed's unscrupulous Dr. Raglan, is a piss-take of '70s self-help culture, and it's Cronenberg's first commercial step in showing how his signature mutations might function within a society. But where *Crimes* '22 explores a government response alongside artistic and more revolutionary factions, *The Brood* glimpses the private sector making a buck, turning the mutations into a business.

Scanners advances Cronenberg's motifs of shadowy agencies and the underground movements who oppose them, as the insidious ConSec hunts down "scanners," human experiment subjects who possess dangerously powerful telepathic abilities. Cronenberg delights in hinting at vast conspiracies and organizations with minimal brush strokes, as well as presenting small enclaves of resistance fighters – in this case, fellow scanners who've found each other and formed a kind of idyllic commune, if only

ILLUSTRATION ©SERENDIPITY POINT FILMS
PHOTOS BY NIKOS NIKOLOPOULOS / ©SERENDIPITY POINT FILMS

(This page and facing, L - R):
Production art of Saul and Caprice's performance space; the pair perform; Saul's coveted SARK unit; director David Cronenberg and Mortensen.

PHOTO ©SERENDIPITY POINT FILMS

in their minds. The film also delivers some memorable visuals via a "scanner artist."

Videodrome is yet another weirdo sociopolitical espionage thriller, as Max Renn (James Woods), an apolitical scumbag looking for the next big porn hit for his cable channel, stumbles upon an apocalyptic plot by Spectacular Optical Corporation to induce hallucination-generating brain tumors in the North American population.

Naked Lunch is navigating trickier waters, as its nightmare imagery is tied very much to the real-life events of the novel's author, William S. Burroughs, in the aftermath of his accidental shooting of his common-law wife Joan Vollmer. The film's lead is a woozy exterminator (Peter Weller) who at some point believes he's, in reality, a secret agent recruited into an assignment by the mysterious Interzone Incorporated (these names!). He delivers his reports to a typewriter-shaped insect supervisor (or is that an insect-shaped typewriter?) and must adopt a "cover" of homosexuality to accomplish his mission. A delirious reimagining of Burroughs' work and life, *Naked Lunch* is open to many reads, but its core – a man descending into a secret, dangerous society as his hold on reality shifts – is classic Cronenberg.

CRONENBERG DELIGHTS IN HINTING AT VAST CONSPIRACIES AND ORGANIZATIONS WITH MINIMAL BRUSH STROKES, AS WELL AS PRESENTING SMALL ENCLAVES OF RESISTANCE FIGHTERS.

Crash is of course an adaptation of J.G. Ballard's 1973 novel, but the concept of car-crash fetishists forming secret little clubs to flirt with death by wrecking cars before fucking is almost too perfect a fit for the director. And *Existenz* takes Cronenberg firmly back to his sociopolitical obsessions, this time as video game companies called Antenna Research and Cortical Systematics engage in corporate rivalry, espionage and assassination over a next-level virtual reality game so realistic, it's spawned – you guessed it – underground revolutionaries called Realists who want to bring the whole industry down.

All of the above films echo throughout *Crimes of the Future*, as the film re-explores and reconsiders themes, scenarios, and even imagery from Cronenberg's filmography. An underground movement waging war on the status quo to pave the way for a new society; mutants turning their conditions into art; a collapsed marriage with a child caught in the middle of some, uh, profound ideological differences; odd government agencies that have cropped up in response to something aberrant happening to the human body; double agents within those institutions; even a callback to the child in 1970, secreting a foamy substance from its mouth.

These phantoms from his earlier work make it tempting to call *Crimes of the Future* Cronenberg's very self-aware final film, if it weren't for the fact that his next film (*The Shrouds*) was announced on the eve of *Crimes*' release. As *The Shrouds* will purportedly deal with the invention of a device that allows communication with the dead (and the corporate espionage that springs up around it, naturally), it's clear that the filmmaker's CV isn't quite finished mutating. 💀

PHOTOS BY DIUNTA GAINES

Chilled and underdressed for this rainy Wednesday afternoon, I'm a bundle of nerves as I arrive in Jackson, Mississippi, during tropical storm Elsa. A newbie to set visits, I know only two things for certain: that anything could happen here, since the plot of the film I'm visiting is still being kept under wraps, and that horror queen and former Fango Director of Marketing Rebekah McKendry is directing it.

This is going to be...well, glorious.

THE GLORIOUS ABYSS

By Julieann Stipidis

Reporting from the set of Rebekah McKendry's riotous rest stop horror.

By the time I arrive to the set of *Glorious*, my nerves have dissipated with the rain, and I'm warmly greeted by McKendry, producer Bob Portal and several other members of the creative team. The vibe feels instantly collaborative and high-spirited, and the crew is ahead of shooting schedule.

"This is one of our best days," producer Jason Goldberg tells me.

"You're really getting your money's worth today," producer Morgan Peter Brown agrees.

They're not wrong. *Glorious* is a wild ride, a conglomerate of subgenres that defies categorization. It's a gory, Lovecraftian horror-comedy with a feminist twist that asks questions of existentialism while primarily taking place inside a blood-splattered public bathroom… and that's just scratching the surface. When Wes (Ryan Kwanten) finds himself in a bad way after a breakup with the only girl he's ever loved, he thinks his life can't get any worse. That is, until he hears a voice speaking to him from the next bathroom stall over, requesting a sacrifice to save humankind – from none other than a Lovecraftian god that knows his every sin. Over the course of my eight hours on set, I witness scenes featuring a massive teddy bear, a prop human liver, an *Under the Skin*-like void, expressions of human agony, and many cries of "More blood!" – an ongoing set joke and loving nod to the late Wes Craven.

"Ahh, the haunted glory hole movie," Goldberg sums up for me. "With the success of *Scare Me* and *Werewolves Within*, people were taking more chances, and this is really going to play with that type of audience. This is really a one-man show, giving Ryan the time to shine."

Glorious is being produced by much of the same team behind the recent *Jakob's Wife*, including producers Portal, Brown, Joe Wicker, Inderpal Singh and executive producer and FANGORIA mainstay Barbara Crampton, who's responsible for Kwanten's involvement here, thanks to their appearances in the shared *Creepshow* series universe. (Goldberg and Christian Armogida round out the producer team.) This set is also only about thirty minutes away from that of *Jakob's Wife*, in the same hospitable Southern area where the only real issues are swampy, unpredictable weather and the bugs. With a cast of merely four and a crew of just 25, the set is small and perfectly contained for COVID times – even, arguably, a direct product of the pandemic itself.

"I'm not sure this movie happens without COVID," Brown explains. "We started looking for smaller casts, fewer locations. Then Bekah sends me this script that takes place entirely in a bathroom. You're like, 'It's great. It's really weird, but it's great. I think we can do it.'"

The production notes for the film suggest the infamous bathroom stall is "the hole at the end of the world," reminding me of the Nietzsche quote:

(This page and facing) Wes (Ryan Kwanten) is Going Thru It.

Restroom horror: Rebekah McKendry and crew get down and dirty on the set of *Glorious*.

"And if thou gaze long into an abyss, the abyss will also gaze into thee." The plot grapples with a gnawingly familiar feeling we've all been afflicted with during the last couple years: isolation, general feelings of unease and nihilism – which is exactly what attracted McKendry to the script written by Todd Rigney and Joshua Hull. Rebekah's husband David Ian McKendry eventually added his talents as co-writer, as well.

"As a female director, the scripts I always get sent are sentimental pieces about your children or rape revenge films," McKendry says. "And those pieces have their time and day, but that's not the type of film I wanted to make right now. I was searching for my Cronenberg piece – the one where I can just go bonkers and weird."

Indeed, the first scene of the day is one of the "weirdest" scenes McKendry has ever directed. Kwanten stands before the camera in a surreal, dream-like sequence in which several women's hands sensually maneuver across the front of his torso. While not falling into the category of rape revenge, in an interesting twist for a film that relies so heavily on its male lead, *Glorious* manages to tackle #MeToo with a feminist revenge arc – something McKendry says she included as the project was evolving. Here, the hands serve as retribution for Wes.

I peer into the lens and catch Kwanten's intense gaze staring directly into the camera. As *Glorious*' protagonist (and antagonist, too), Wes is a complicated guy – we meet him at the lowest point of his life, as he's thrust into a situation to save humanity... which he otherwise couldn't give a damn about. A darkened, impulsive criminal with affability, Kwanten's Wes is the epitome of an anti-hero.

"I strive to humanize Wes, no matter what," Kwanten tells me that afternoon, as we accidentally almost get locked into a backstage area (the start of our own horror movie, I joke). "Some people have a propensity to take evil further than others. Wes is like an open wound that's never healed and never will."

Many recall Kwanten as the hunky Jason Stackhouse from *True Blood*, and the pensive actor is grateful for the "taxing" role of Wes, for which he channeled a rough couple years he'd experienced into his performance. I get the chance to look through an incriminating red box of Wes' darker side, with prop photographs and evidence.

"I had been looking to do something in this kind of vein," Kwanten tells me. "I wanted to be ripped apart. And in a weird, masochistic way, I've really, thoroughly enjoyed it and learned a lot about myself, at the same time."

One of the women whose hands approach his body in that dreamlike sequence is Wes' ex-girlfriend Brenda, portrayed by *The Hunt* actress (and gutsy FANGORIA Issue 7 cover girl) Sylvia Grace Crim. With large, expressive eyes and dressed ethereally in white, Brenda is described to me as "Wes' ideal," whose presence haunts him long after she exits his life, as the seemingly gullible character is the one person who captures Wes' otherwise cold heart.

PHOTOS BY DIUNTA GAINES / WALL ARTWORK BY CLINT CARNEY.

You'd lose it too if
a bathroom glory hole started
asking you for a human sacrifice.

“Ahh, the haunted glory hole movie.”

– Jason Goldberg

“You don’t see Brenda a whole lot – she’s not a huge part of the story – but she’s a vital part,” Crim says, declaring her hopes that the character will provide some solace to women watching the film who have been through similar relationships. “You see him meet her. You see her tell her boyfriend that she loves him. You see when she discovers something not so good about her loved one. It begins really loving and bright and fun… and then it gets dark.”

I witness Crim’s delivery grow sterner and angrier with every take. “I told you not to look at me,” Brenda says to Wes.

The chemistry between Kwanten and Crim is apparent. “Being on set with Ryan is so wonderful because he makes me *feel*,” Crim emphasizes. “[During the filming of an intimate scene] my heart was racing; I was getting so nervous. His eyes… he acts through his eyeballs, and it’s so intense.”

To guide them through the intensity is McKendry, whose directing style is patient, engaging, fun, enthusiastic — yet subdued, if the scene in question calls for it. Kwanten tells me about McKendry’s propensity for helpful, in-depth performance notes, while Crim agrees that McKendry is an “actor’s director.”

“Her energy level lowers during scenes where we need to be calm and quiet, and then she’ll give you energy when something needs to be amped up,” Crim explains. “She’s there for us.”

I watch the director speak (and crack up) with Kwanten in between takes of another climatic scene that includes his body covered in blood with anguished outcries and loss of sanity on Wes’ part.

“Is this like his *Mandy* moment? He’s Nic Cage right now?” I ask of McKendry.

She nods. “Yes, the chainsaw moment.”

With its reliance on pivotal solo performance moments like the above, *Glorious* often resembles a stage play, which crew members tell me was advantageous to the running of the production as a whole. With a shot list created by the self-described “OCD” McKendry, sufficient rehearsal time for actors, and prep time for blocking strategies for cinematographer David Matthews, the film even had the advantage of being shot chronologically – a feat rarer than discovering a Lovecraftian god in a truck stop bathroom stall.

What the hell’s up with this god, anyway? The deity Wes discovers in the stall next to his is none other than Ghat (short for Ghatanothoa, the spawn of Cthulhu in Lovecraft’s mythology), voiced by Oscar-winning actor J.K. Simmons. While Simmons was not on set that day, the largely-unseen Ghat is present – its appearance almost resembling a cross between *Basket Case*’s Belial and the stomach demon from *Bad Milo*. In a subversion of expectations, Wes, the human, is the inhumane, while Ghat, the monster, is the empath. The hideous yet charming Ghat actually digs humans and begs Wes to help him prevent his dad, the big C, from ending the world.

“Ghat is illuminating certain things in his own personality and worldview, which are pretty devastating for Wes,”

Portal says. "This is the constant threat throughout the film. In the end, it's kind of a buddy movie or a meet-cute movie between those bathroom stalls."

I'm warned to wear foot coverings over my shoes as I'm taken to those very bathroom stalls. Every inch of the set space's walls, stalls, urinals, mirrors, and sinks is floor-to-ceiling doused in blood splatter that would make the *Evil Dead* remake jealous. I watch members of the art department, hailing from local Mississippi Halloween events and haunts, sprawl half a prop leg across the bathroom floor. "We knew we had to do this on a sound stage," Goldberg explains. "We wanted something that looks realistic and looks grosser over time that actually becomes a character." Everything from walks through IKEA bathrooms, a Bloodhound Gang music video, and *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me* served as inspiration for either production design or the angles for which the bathroom would be shot. I'm reminded of the original *Candyman* graffitied bathroom stall during my tour of the stage.

"There have been so many aesthetical conversations about bathrooms in this movie," McKendry says. "Is it the bathroom from *Trainspotting*? *The Shining*? CBGB's?"

McKendry and Kwanten talk through a scene.

"Some people have a propensity to take evil further than others. Wes is like an open wound that's never healed and never will."

– Ryan Kwanten

This could be the weirdest co-star Kwanten's ever had.

Wes' past catches up with him – and wants its pound of flesh.

Everything on the *Glorious* set – including Ghat, a silicone cast on Kwanten, and gag-worthy bodily human fluids – is practical, which is impressive for us viewers, but challenging for any set of filmmakers, as they often have no choice but to get it right in one shot. At one point, the crew had to conjure a quick solution to a blood coloring crisis in which the shade of the gore was a tad too close to the set's red, giallo-like lighting. Within minutes, the team came up with a darker, more realistic shade of blood to even out the red hues. "That's when filmmaking gets really beautiful," McKendry says. "When the whole team comes together to make sure something is expedited properly."

"Every setup the FX guys did, including a silicone cast on myself, was exceptional, timely, and added a real sense of gravitas to it," Kwanten tells me. "That's all manpower."

In what will undoubtedly be one of the film's biggest WTF moments, the crew prepares a 5'1" life-size teddy bear costume before the shoot's next scene. Brought to life by costume designer/makeup artist/FX blood expert Mary Czech, The Bear is cute but creepy and filled with stuffing — which becomes integral to the very scene I'm observing. "Get your paws into pos-ish," McKendry says to the team. Once a gift to Wes from Brenda, The Bear (aka the film's own Cheddar Goblin, I overhear someone say) is a symbol of Wes' shame from their relationship, and it's haunting him in this sequence. "The Bear has seen some shit," McKendry tells me, with a communal laugh from the room.

"You could say it… bear'd witness," Brown chuckles.

Like the hands scene, The Bear sequence is another first for McKendry. After several takes and varying angles, McKendry points out the irony in watching a giant teddy bear stand over a grown man, like the bear is a parent scolding their child who just drew all over the walls. "The situation itself is insanely surrealistic, and there's humor in that."

McKendry admits the horror-comedy subgenre has become a tough sell to sales agents, but the absurdist comedy provides some crucial levity to *Glorious'* dense Lovecraftian tale, and made it a perfect fit for Shudder. Acknowledging that spending most of the film's runtime inside a bathroom with two characters conversing is bound to get philosophical, McKendry pulls heady concepts from classic philosophy sources like Sartre, Einstein's theories of destination and time, and Samuel Beckett. "It takes these ethereal concepts and puts them inside a more guttural environment where you wouldn't expect to find them: a bathroom."

This mixture of weighty themes buried in transgressive, shocking material is what horror is all about, and like any piece of worthy art, the response to *Glorious* will vary according to viewers' mileage – but it'll leave an impression. "Some people will love this movie, and some people will probably hate it," McKendry says. "At the end of the day, I just want to give them something they haven't seen before and *feel*, and it may be that they have a revulsion to it – but as long as it makes them feel *something*." 💀

PHOTOS BY DIUNTA GAINES

PHOTOS COURTESY PROSTHETIC RENAISSANCE INC.

Ladies and Gentlemen, THE WEEKND ('S MAKEUP FX ARTIST)

Mike Marino's ongoing collaboration with the pop star echoes the past while forging a path to the future.

By Phil Nobile Jr.

In 2018, attendees of Monsterpalooza in Pasadena saw something on the con floor that stopped them in their tracks and was, in retrospect, a bit portentous. Prosthetic Makeup FX Designer Mike Marino was walking alongside something he and colleague Mike Fontaine made especially for the show: a picture-perfect recreation of Rick Baker's werecat from *Michael Jackson's Thriller*. Neither artist nor subject could get ten paces before another fan stopped them for a photo with the iconic creation, one unmistakably rendered with care, detail and love; an artist paying reverent homage to his hero.

As it did to many FX artists of Marino's generation, Baker's groundbreaking work on the King of Pop's 1983 music video masterpiece left an indelible mark on him. But it wasn't the video itself that impacted the artist so much as the making-of documentary, which showcased the pioneering makeup artist as much as — if not more than — the singer.

"The video is cool, but *The Making of Thriller* was the best thing," Marino says. "I had it all memorized, every word. I was really little when I saw it. I taped it and watched it over and over like a thousand times, just to try to figure out what the hell was really going on. And that's when I first heard of Rick Baker and saw the work, and knew that makeup FX was something you can make and create. It was a green light for me; I thought 'Okay, this is something I want to do.' Rick Baker became my idol immediately. I was like, 'I want to be Rick Baker.'"

The Weeknd (aka Abel Tesfaye) gets a little work done, courtesy of Mike Marino.

A *Shining*-inspired visage from The Weeknd's "Sacrifice."

With Baker now retired, Marino and his company Prosthetic Renaissance FX have risen over the years to become the best of the best, with credits like *The Batman*, *Joker*, *The Dead Don't Die*, and *Coming 2 America* (in which he literally stepped into Baker's shoes, and for which he was Oscar-nominated). But his obsession with Baker, and that early imprint made by *Thriller*, are key to understanding a different project of Marino's: his ongoing work with one of the most talented pop artists alive, The Weeknd (known to his friends and makeup FX artists as Abel Tesfaye).

Over the past three years, The Weeknd's darkly cinematic, foreboding music videos have dialed up their nightmare imagery, and Marino's increasingly horrific makeup creations are the crown jewels in these works. (The music is also great, for the record.) From a bloodied, broken nose, to unfortunate plastic surgery, to the singer beating an aged version of himself to a misshapen pulp on a hellish dancefloor, their work together is emerging as the most significant collaboration between FX artist and musician since Jackson and his

From clay to flesh: Stunt double Gee Alexander is transformed into an old, battered version of The Weeknd (inspired by Rick Baker's face-splitting work in *Videodrome*).

zombie horde danced their way onto TVs nearly 40 years ago.

And we have The Safdie Brothers to thank for it. The filmmakers showed Tesfaye some of Marino's work while the singer was filming 2019's *Uncut Gems*. "They had wanted to work with me on *Good Time*, and it didn't work out. I couldn't do it. And I guess I came up on the *Uncut Gems* set; they started talking about me, and I guess showed him some stuff; he's a fan of makeup."

Makeup artist Toni G (*Planet of the Apes*, *Eternals*) also sang Marino's praises to the musician. Soon after, the phone rang. "'Hey man, I do this broken nose thing. Maybe you can make it better.' So the first thing I did was this broken nose, and just made it a little bit crazier looking, more realistic," Marino says. The Weeknd debuted that work at the VMAs, though "Mike Fontaine actually did the makeup on him that day, because I was in London."

The Weeknd's banged-up visage made waves. Fans tweeted; trades ran articles about it. As David Bowie used his persona and image to play with audiences' expectations, so too did The Weeknd, with Marino's invaluable help. And unlike your basic one-and-done music video makeup gigs, The Weeknd was rocking these looks at live events: after showing up beat to hell at the VMAs, he appeared swollen-faced and covered in bandages at the American Music Awards. Then, after a season of eluding the questions about *why* ("I suppose you could take that being attractive isn't important to me but a compelling narrative is," the singer told *Variety*), Tesfaye and Marino hit the gas in 2021.

On January 5, 2021, The Weeknd's Instagram account dropped a horrifying selfie of the singer teasing his new music video ("Save Your Tears"), showing off a face full of what one might charitably call a little too much plastic surgery. It was on Marino to evoke that reaction, while keeping the extreme look in the realm of the plausible. "There are a lot of weird plastic surgeries out there. I showed him a bunch of different examples and said, 'How about *these* lips? How about *these* cheekbones?' Why don't we mix this and that?' And he said 'Let's do it.'" Marino's too-real aesthetic leaned on one particular pair of celebrities. "There were two French twin brothers out there, Grichka and Igor Bogdanoff. Lots of plastic surgery; they looked so weird. That was probably the primary reference I used." Originally even more horrific in design, Marino says he "toned it down on the day, because it looked too raw. But you can see some scarring towards the temple area, as if it was fairly damaged in some way."

Fans were aghast and online gossip sites exploded over this new look, wondering what would cause the musician to do this to himself.

Which was, of course, part of the performance. The video dropped, the screen filled with Marino's work, and speculation continued, until the pair eventually tipped their hand on social media (to the relief

Just for fun: Marino turned Tesfaye into Eddie Murphy's Nutty Professor one Halloween.

Marino and Mike Fontaine with their Rick Baker "Thriller" tribute at Monsterpalooza 2018.

PHOTO (LEFT): PHIL NOBILE JR.

of the singer's 38 million followers). Like his later Colin Farrell Penguin creation for *The Batman*, Marino's work had transcended what the human eye registers as "make-up" and just looked… well, real.

For *Dawn FM*, The Weeknd's latest album, Marino has again ramped things up, but resists the idea that there's any grand scheme at play. Take the cover of the album, featuring a very old Weeknd staring back. "That was just a random thing. He was like, 'Oh, I want to be old.' So we did this old-age makeup, and then next thing you know, he had his guy photograph him and it was the fucking cover of his album. I wish I would've known, because then I would've wiped the blood off of his eye that you can see in the shot."

And inspiration strikes when it strikes, sometimes to Marino's surprise. "I'll text him back saying, 'You fucker!' *[laughs]* Because you never have two or three months to do anything. It's always, 'Hey, in three weeks from now, we're going to do *this*.' But I always want to do it because, number one, I really like him, and two, I think he's a really great artist. His ideas are good, and I always want to accommodate him. So there's always some way to make it work somehow."

The video for "Sacrifice" leaves the singer's mug surprisingly untouched, but a nightmarish supporting character draws inspo from an unlikely source. "I made her as a version of the old woman in the bathtub from *The Shining*. This certain style of leprosy, or some kind of moldy thing going on. That came out of us having watched *The Shining*, and we were like, 'let's do something like that.'"

The "Gasoline" music video might represent Marino's biggest efforts to date in The Weeknd's universe. An aged version of the singer crashes his car, wanders into a hellish nightclub, de-ages, and confronts his old self… and gives him a beatdown so severe the old man's face seems on the verge of splitting open lengthwise.

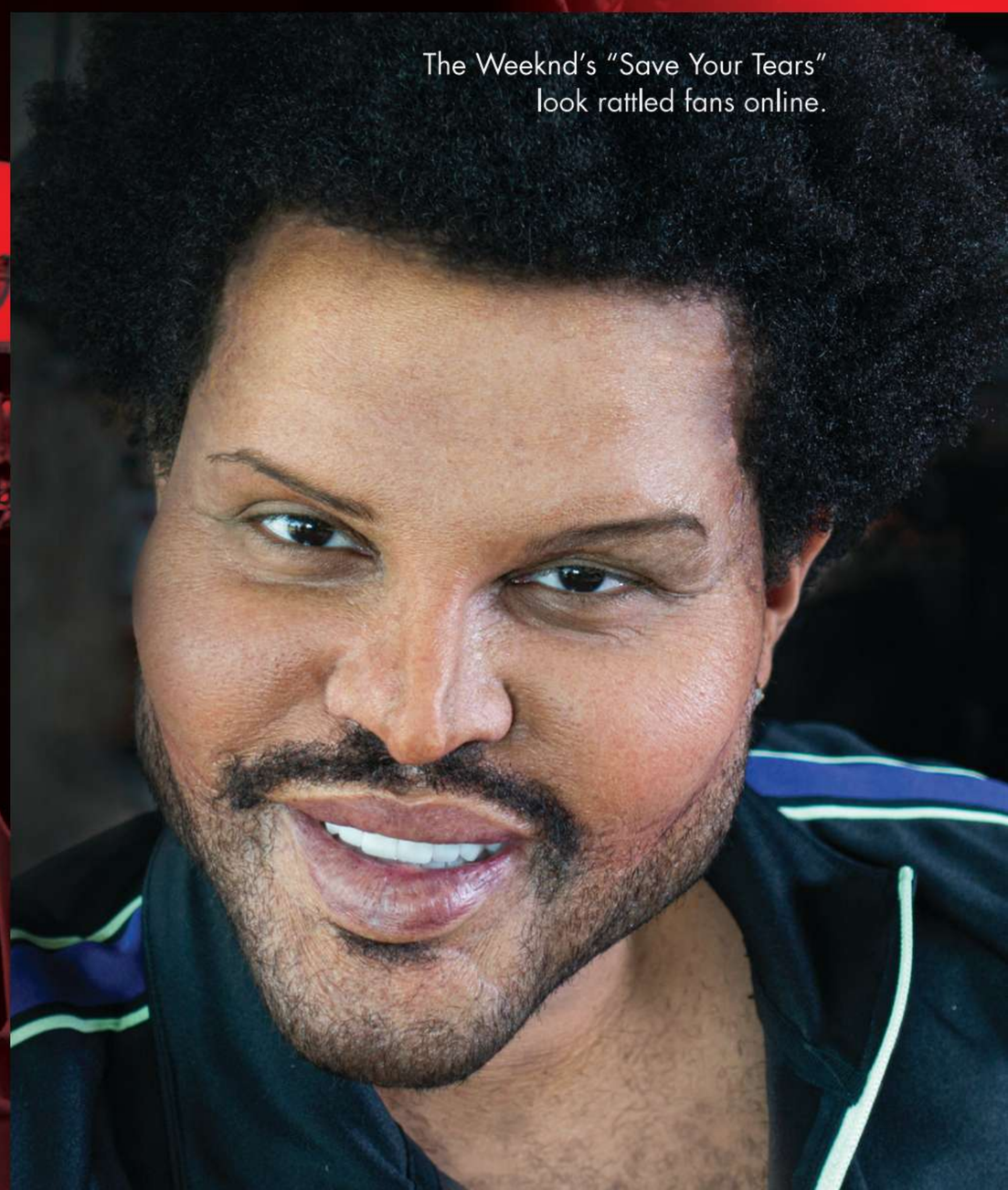
For that particular moment, Marino once more drew upon the work of Rick Baker, as well as one of Tesfaye's Canadian countrymen: "It's actually based on David Cronenberg's *Videodrome*; the scene Rick did where the guy is wiggling around on the floor, and his face splits and the tumors explode out of his head. That's total Cronenberg shit, and Abel is such a *Videodrome* fan."

Throughout his conversation with FANGORIA, Marino enthuses about The Weeknd's love of both horror and the craft of special makeup FX. "He respects the art. We're good friends and he's a really good collaborator. I think he respects me and our studio as artists, and I respect him. It's a good, working friendship that's open to a lot of ideas. He's a really down-to-earth guy. He's not what people maybe think he's like. He's really a horror geek like us." It doesn't hurt, Marino opines, that they're both a little retro. "If you pick up on his musical influences, he's a big '70s and '80s guy. My influences are Rick's and Rob Bottin's work in the '80s, and Dick Smith in the '70s. It's all considered old, but man, it's the best stuff."

And they're not done yet, though Marino is cagey on details. "We've done something else that he hasn't really revealed yet, which is this weird mask. He showed it in his last video with Jim Carrey ("Out of Time"), and it's sitting on the table. It's like this Phantom of the Opera-type of mask. You see Carrey placing it over his face, but you don't know really what's happening yet. So that's going to be a continuation of that; we'll see more later."

In a career that's taken him from Scorsese films to comedic zombie epics to the streets of Gotham City, Marino considers the collaboration with The Weeknd the ride of his life.

"We just jam on ideas, and then it just happens. He has fun with it. He has an idea, and then I send a reference and he's like, 'Shit, that's cool. Let's do that.' He's not really a pain in the ass about, 'Oh, let's see ten different versions of this.' He just trusts me and believes that I'll just come up with something cool based on his idea, and then we'll make it work somehow. It's a fun, constant collaboration." 💀



The Weeknd's "Save Your Tears" look rattled fans online.

TARO TRAM

Taro Tram hails from Vietnam, and though she studied graphic design, she found the field unfulfilling and left to pursue art. These days she concentrates on semi-realistic portraits and children's book illustrations. Taro describes most of her art as "friendly, cute, and cheerful," yet here we are.

Congrats on winning the FANGORIA X DeviantArt contest!, Taro!

View more of her work at:
tarotram.artstation.com

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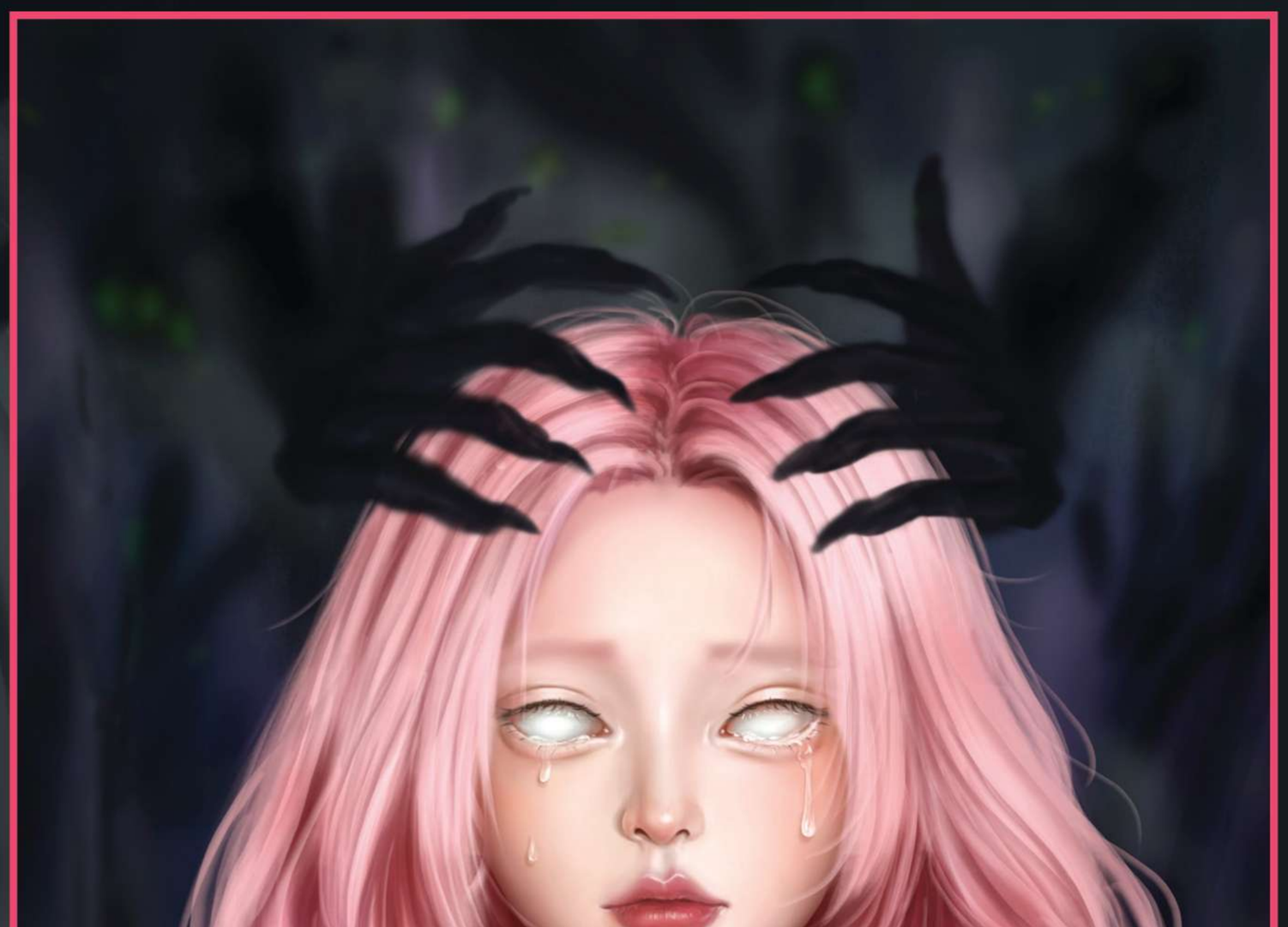
top: **BLOODY TEETH**
bottom left: **DRACULA**
bottom right: **I WARN YOU**



LEATHERFACES

By Brian W. Collins

Illustrated by Chantal Handley

When Fede Alvarez announced he would be producing a new "direct sequel" to *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, many fans just had to laugh. That was what *Texas Chainsaw 3D* was doing! And *Next Generation*. And, despite the "III" in the full title, 1990's *Leatherface*. While almost no major horror franchise goes without the occasional reset or retcon (*bows in respect to Chucky and Don Mancini*), the *TCM* series goes above and beyond when it comes to such things; across nine films, there are at least five timelines to choose from if you want to decide on the "true" canon.

But to be fair, behind-the-scenes drama is to blame for a lot of that; you can live a full life without owning as many cars as the number of studios who have "owned" Leatherface. With each new owner comes an inherent (and occasionally legally enforced) need to ignore this or that character or storyline. It's not that the new folks coming on don't realize how much we love Chop Top or want to see Alexandra Daddario return in full Sawyer mode – it's sometimes a simple matter of not having the proper rights to bring them back.

As a result, the constant resetting has fractured its ability to compete with the other big franchises, most of which reward their fanbase with returning characters and storylines, whereas the *Chainsaw* films habitually dismiss anything specifically related to their fellow sequels. With Tobe Hooper being the lone director to ever return for a second film (albeit without any of his primary collaborators), it stands to reason that each new creative team would feel a need to make their mark and more or less start from scratch each time even if they did have access to previous elements. On the commentary for *TCM3*, someone even notes that it's not unlike the *Mad Max* series in a way, in that there's a general idea but no real continuity at all to speak of, let alone one to treat as gospel. Basically, the 1974 film is the only one that is set in stone, with the others being digressions from which the new teams can cherry pick what they like and ignore the rest.

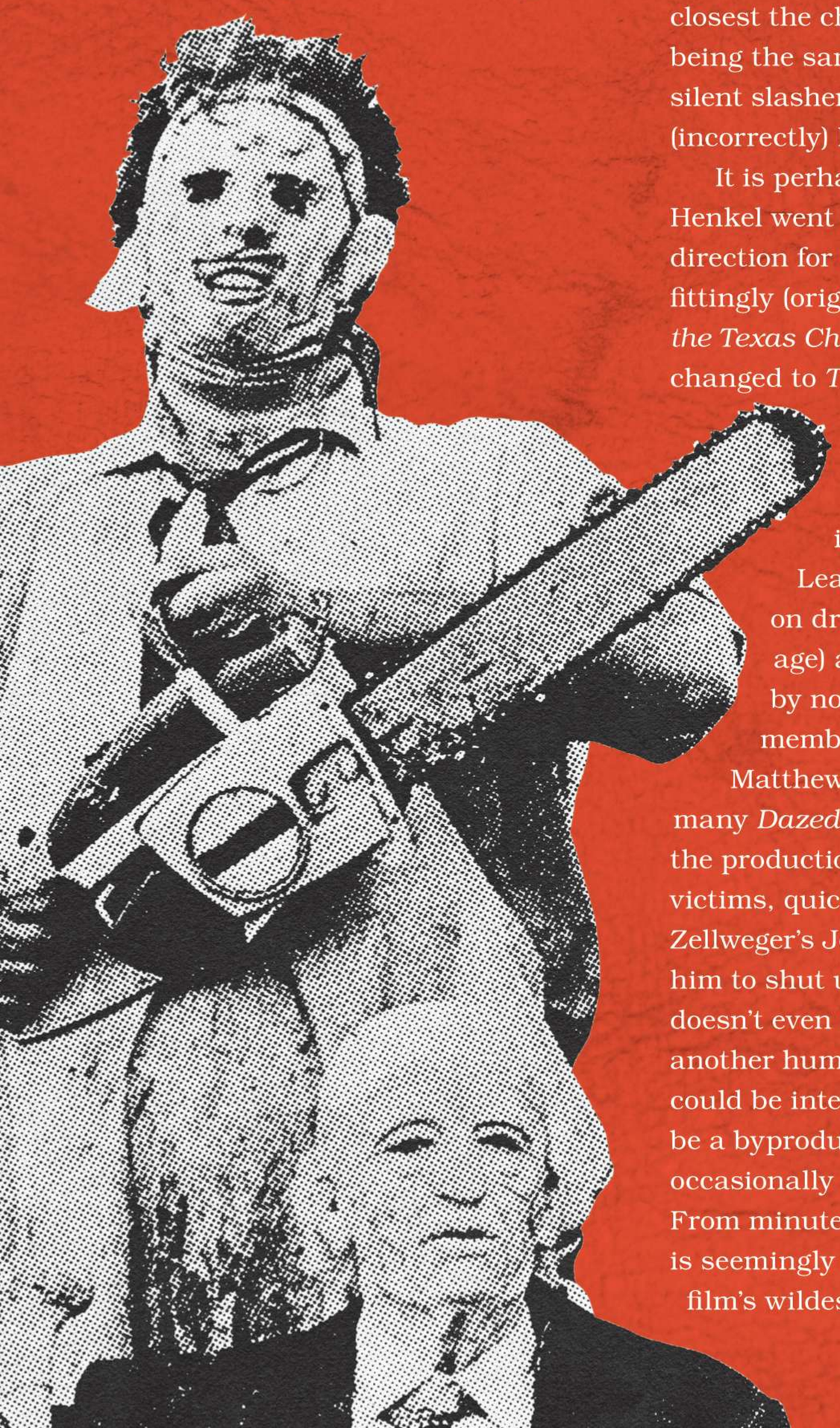
On the other hand, this gives each new team more room to play, without being boxed in by the decisions on X number of previous films, leaving Leatherface himself as the lone constant. Gunnar Hansen's take on the character remains the gold standard, and rightfully so, as Hooper and Kim Henkel wisely injected some personality, even a touch of pathos, for what could have been a generic hulking killer. This decision not only allowed him to stand out from other masked/silent maniacs who would come along after him, but establish a template that his successors could use as a starting point, with nothing seeming too "out of character" when he's been erratic from the start. Yes, we've all had nightmares about his iconic entrance – almost matter-of-factly stepping out, clubbing Kirk over the head, and slamming the door shut – but it's a later scene that always sticks with me, after he kills Kirk and shoves Pam back into the freezer. After this chaotic moment, Leatherface suddenly panics, as if he's wondering "Where are all these jerks coming from?," rushing to the window and checking it multiple times to ensure that there aren't any more about to enter his home (while also fretting about whatever trouble he's about to get into from his short-tempered brother). He also wears at least three outfits in the film, establishing precedent for any future deviations in wardrobe. If Jason Voorhees steps out in *Friday the 13th Part 13* wearing a tie all of a sudden it's gonna be weird, but my man here can show up in a tuxedo without it being much of an issue.

The original also established something else about the character, most obvious in the film's legendary dinner scene: at times he almost comes off as the most normal one. Jim Siedow and Edwin Neal's antics in that scene, all set to Marilyn Burns' nearly endless screaming, leave the guy wearing a mask made of human skin looking almost subtle in comparison; they're all shouting at each other while "dinner party" Leatherface just presumably wonders if he forgot anyone's table setting. Not to skip ahead, but it's interesting that the two most memorable aspects of 2013's *Texas Chainsaw 3D* are the opening sequence featuring the Sawyer clan (including Hansen as who I assume is Leatherface's uncle; the family lineage in these movies is harder to follow than their timelines), and Alexandra Daddario's climactic embracing of her roots, encapsulated with the immortal "Do your thing, cuz!" Leatherface may be the marquee character, but he's only as interesting as the people around him, something Gun has clearly noted, or else it would just be Leatherface vs. X number of player victims.

This is backed up, and then some, by the first batch of sequels. While Jim Siedow returned as Drayton for 1986's *Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2*, it's Bill Moseley's turn as Chop Top

that will stick in your brain for years even if you didn't care much for the film. Unlike Edwin Neal's Hitchhiker, Chop Top (who carries the Hitchhiker's corpse around and is said to have been in Vietnam during the previous film's events, the lone instance in the entire series of explaining where a new family member came from) has a real brotherly bond with "Bubba," even slapping him five after a kill and egging on his seeming crush on Stretch. Oh yes, this is "horny" Leatherface, with Bill Johnson leaving no question as to what his oversized chainsaw is meant to symbolize as he slowly points it toward Stretch's crotch and then, after being unable to get it running for a bit, uses it on several soda cans, spraying their foamy white liquid everywhere (I trust this needs no explanation).

With Hooper directing, it makes sense that Johnson's performance isn't too far removed from Hansen's – he mimics his predecessor's lip-licking nervous tic and other mannerisms, and even though the face makeup is



revised the overall "look" is no more different than Jason or Freddy would look from one film to the next. However, R.A. Mihailoff's turn in 1990's *TCM3* marked a departure; the various colors of his fancy suits have been replaced with different/dirty shades of brown, and his performance is more "rebellious teenager" than the occasionally skittish brute Leatherface came off as in the previous films. And with a whole new cast of family members (including the family's first living female member, played by Miriam Byrd-Nethery), he occasionally kind of gets lost in the shuffle despite the film's subtitle suggesting he was going to take center stage. There are more villains than victims in this film (with reshoots robbing Leatherface of one of his few kills!), and Mihailoff's take is much less vocal and frantic than his predecessors, so there just isn't as much for him to *do*. There's still some personality (love the "F-O-O-D" bit when he's trying a Speak 'n Spell type game), but despite the marketing's best efforts, it's the closest the character ever came to being the same kind of anonymous silent slasher he's occasionally (incorrectly) lumped in with.

It is perhaps because of this that Henkel went in the complete opposite direction for his return to the series, fittingly (originally) titled *Return of the Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (later changed to *TCM: The Next Generation*). Robert Jacks' take on the character is far and away the most polarizing of the franchise, with Leatherface appearing in full on drag (complete with cleavage) and being emasculated by not just his fellow family members (including a fresh Matthew McConaughey, one of many *Dazed and Confused* vets on the production) but even one of his victims, quickly obeying Renée Zellweger's Jenny when she tells him to shut up and sit down. He doesn't even use his chainsaw on another human in the film, which could be intentional or could just be a byproduct of the film's manic, occasionally exhausting vibe. From minute one every character is seemingly attempting to be the film's wildest one, so it kind of makes

(relative) sense they'd overlook something as simple/normal as Leatherface chainsawing someone. But that's not to say he doesn't make any impression; love or hate the film, few can deny that Jacks is giving 110% in every frame (by all accounts, if anything the late actor was perhaps dialing his usual self *down* in order to play the character), and if you can go along with the film's whacked-out approach to the material, you might end up loving what he (and everyone else) is bringing to the table.

Few fans *did* go along with it, however, so it's not surprising that when Platinum Dunes took over for the next two films (a remake of the original and a prequel to that remake), they brought the character more or less back to basics, with Andrew Bryniarski landing somewhere between Hansen and Mihailoff's takes in terms of appearance and behavior. The mask was a little over-designed for my tastes, looking nothing like human skin, but one thing they really nailed in these two is Leatherface's (renamed Thomas Hewitt for this sub-series) job as a butcher. One of the 2003 film's most memorable scenes is when he's got Mike Vogel's hobbled character hung on a meathook, methodically salting the poor bastard's leg stub and then wrapping it as one might a pound of sirloin, and in the next film he even checks inside a victim's mouth as if inspecting a cow. The prequel also lets Bryniarski go somewhat unmasked for most of its runtime, with only the bottom half of his face covered until its closing moments, allowing the character's human side to come off slightly more than usual (and for what it's worth, the fresh mask he makes here is much better than the 2003 version). Unfortunately, Leatherface rarely interacts with his family in these films, sharing little time with R. Lee Ermey's insane Sheriff Holt or the other Hewitts, which is fine (it's a remake - make it your own!) but also results in the character again feeling more anonymous.

As mentioned, this is a big problem in the 3D entry, as he has no other family members at all except for Daddario, whose relation is only made clear to him in the film's final reel. So the big lug spends his scenes just picking off her idiot friends one by one,

though we do get a glimpse of his lair, complete with a revenge board (!) and a functioning record player, suggesting he's got a little more going on upstairs than most of the other counterparts. He's also pretty stylish; after Mihailoff and Byrniarski's grubbier appearances, this one has a nice red shirt and tie, and at one point even dons a sweater I wouldn't mind wearing myself. His face is even pretty normal from what little we see of it in a mirror, a far cry from the other (also brief) "unmasked" moments in the sequels, which often remove his nose or something, as if to justify why he feels a skin mask would be less unsettling.

Unfortunately we never got to see this take on the character again, as the next film went the prequel route, focusing on our boy when he was a teenager. And as if this wasn't misguided enough, they also turn it into a mystery, presenting three escaped mental patients and informing us that *one of them* will grow up to be the person we know as Leatherface. If you've never seen a movie before you might be surprised that it's neither the most outwardly violent one or the quiet hulking brute (i.e. the obvious suspects), but the most "normal" one of the three, a twist that means absolutely nothing in the grand scheme of things since the series' timeline has never meant anything, making his or anyone else's origin a complete non-concern. Even the name "Sawyer," about the only thing that one might recognize from the series, is an invention of the sequels it was erasing, anyway. And despite the title, it's only in the final moments he even puts on a mask, a necessity due to a shotgun blast that mangles most of his conventionally handsome face.

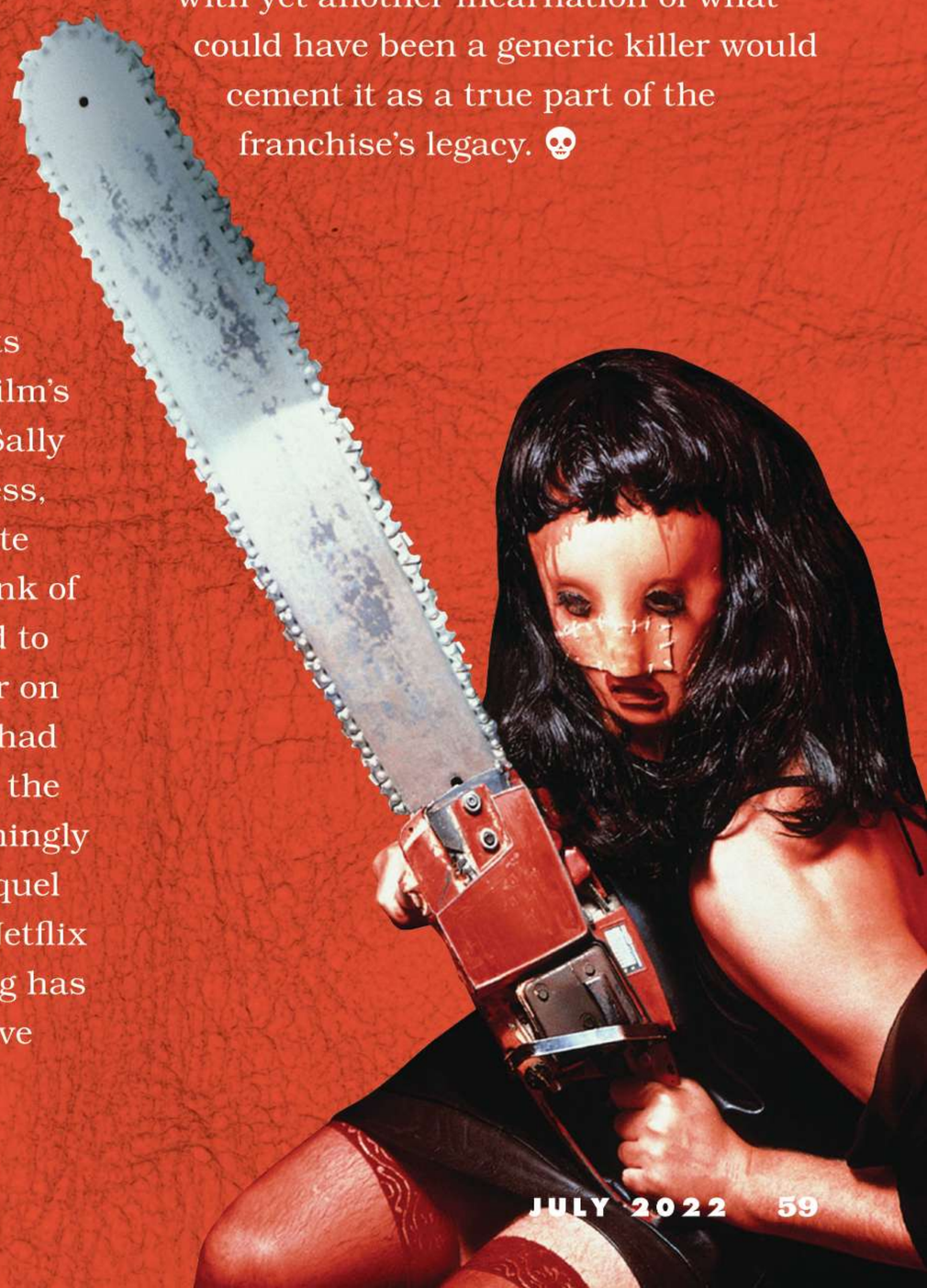
Which brings us to Netflix's sequel, which in keeping with the (thoroughly obnoxious) trend of having followups that are titled more like remakes, is simply titled *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (no "The" or space between "Chain" and "Saw" - big whoop). That makes it sound more like a remake, which is ironic because it often comes off as one, albeit not of the original but *TCM3D*. Once again they have Leatherface on a solo mission, with his only family member being a woman he barely interacts with – no Cook or Chop Top type to egg him on. Said woman is an adoptive mother played by Alice Krige, who has seemingly domesticated ol' Bubba – he is quietly living with her in her orphanage and no longer killing anyone (or, presumably, eating them).

But when the old woman dies of a heart attack after some millennial entrepreneurs force her out of the home (they want to turn it into a brunch spot, naturally), Leatherface goes full John Wick, retrieving his chainsaw out of the wall he's cemented it behind (!) and – in a weird tribute, I guess? – fashioning a new mask out of his recently departed mother's face. This about the only new thing that they are bringing to the table here, as while we've seen him working on masks before, I believe this is the first time it's been shown that the mask includes someone he cares about as opposed to a victim. And we see him mourn her death, which gives him some pathos (honestly, given how annoying the hipster kids are, it's pretty easy to root for him in this one), but that just made this writer want to watch a film that took place in between, with him just living his day to day in this tiny town and being a good son to the woman.

The rest is pretty anonymous. There are some good kills and, finally, an actual chainsaw massacre, but while Mark Burnham looks the part (i.e. he's gigantic) he doesn't have much time to leave an impression. The film is only 74 minutes long minus credits, and he doesn't get his face until nearly a half hour in (with his chainsaw another ten or so minutes after that), keeping marquee hero shots of him to a minimum. Plus, the film's big calling card is the return of Sally Hardesty (albeit with a new actress, Olwen Fouéré, filling in for the late Marilyn Burns), so a sizable chunk of that portion of the film is devoted to reintroducing her and getting her on the scene. Ultimately, he's never had fewer fellow antagonists to share the spotlight with, but he's also seemingly in it less than ever. Perhaps a sequel (one can assume a direct one if Netflix remains involved, though nothing has been announced as of yet) can give Burnham more time to put his stamp on things.

And I believe he can, because unlike Michael Myers or Jason, there's a real chance to shine when portraying Leatherface, due to the character's interactions with his family, penchant for dress up, and (so far) a blessed lack of supernatural elements that have allowed him to retain his relative humanity. Few of the films have really made an attempt to "kill" the character, preferring to leave him still standing at the end, swinging his chainsaw around in frustration at losing another victim or (in *3D*'s case) happily assisting his new family member settle her grievances. The seeming inability for this series to ever go more than two films in a row without hitting a reset button of some sort means there has always been license for the new filmmakers to do whatever they want with him (and the brand as a whole), with "a face made of human skin and a chainsaw" being the only constants throughout the nine films to date. So regardless of what happens next with him/the series, I think we can be assured that it won't be the same old thing. There's never been a status quo here, and at this point? It's a feature, not a bug.

With that in mind, perhaps Gun Media can – rather than deal with lawyers to license this or that version – opt to create their own take on the character? In a weird way, coming up with yet another incarnation of what could have been a generic killer would cement it as a true part of the franchise's legacy. 💀



MASKED MONSTERS

By Jolene Richardson | Illustration By Dwayne Wingert

Disguises are often used to hide a killer's identity — but they can just as frequently unleash the inner beast.

Two-faced: *Terror Train*'s killer mixes it up.

Costuming and masks are nothing new in world culture. These practices date back to before written history, usually attached to tribal rituals or ceremonies. We see it in theater history as well. Japanese and Italian traditions use masks to portray characters through the arc of a story. Shakespeare was fascinated with what disguises could do for his characters, telling us that people are never what they seem. So, of course, in a genre of deception, death, and jump scares, screenwriters use these devices to frighten us. They also do more — they allow our killers a level of strength that they usually would not have, despite their destructive thoughts.

Just as online harrrassers are more inclined to attack others with a screen between them, killers use their disguises as a layer of protection. As humans, our brains look for faces and recognize them everywhere we look, which is why the fronts of cars or pieces of toast spark images of figures like Jesus or Elvis. When you cover a person's face, the human response is instant fear. Even with a mask that could be a face, our brains recognize that what is before us is rubber, or in the case of Leatherface, human flesh. The face and eyes become lost and expressionless, and the modified vocal capacity creates a deeply disturbing effect, as well as a powerful way to commit crimes. You become a faceless figure in the crowd.

We see this done brilliantly with the masks in the 1980 film *Terror Train*. Seeking revenge for past trauma, Kenny (Derek McKinnon) decides to wreak havoc at the New Year's Eve costume party train his classmates have embarked on. It becomes the perfect murder setting, because even in close quarters, only the dying victims get to see the face of our

Fade to Black: Eric Binford loves his mummy.

killer. He can pass through unnoticed, his meek frame filled with the strength of each character played. Costume designer Veronica Hadfield (or Penny, as she is credited) chose distinctly harmless costumes for Kenny. We see Ed wearing a Groucho Marx mask at the beginning of the film. When Kenny kills Ed at the onset of our story, taking his mask, Kenny can freely lure in his victims without the threat of being caught.

The same case is shown in another 1980 classic *Fade to Black*, where Eric Binford (Dennis Christopher) uses the characters in his favorite films to conjure the power to seek revenge on those who have wronged him. Through Vernon Zimmerman's writing and direction, wardrobe head Doris Lynn uses distinctly masculine looks to give Eric his punch. Second-wave feminism challenged the idea of masculinity in post-1970s American culture. Eric specifically uses Dracula, Cody Jarrett, and Hopalong Cassidy as examples of rough men in well-tailored garments, shooting and stalking their prey, which adds to his aggression. We see toxic masculinity looms over a lot of our killers in disguise.

Since the beginning of horror history, disguises have been crafted to work to the advantage of killers. When evil lurks inside of you, or you have become repressed by societal standards, a sense of freedom can come with being someone else. Horror villains are often shown at the beginning of films coming from repressive or bullying households, usually by a mother or female figure. But despite upbringing, haven't we all felt like this when life throws us curve balls? Haven't we wondered, if we were someone else and didn't have to think about the adversities presiding over us — would our lives be better?

I've seen evidence of the strength in disguises beyond the movie screen. In 1964, Kitty Genovese was brutally murdered outside her Queens apartment upon coming home from work. This case was monumental because her killer, Winston Moseley, pleaded not guilty by reason of insanity, only to be found guilty later, in part because he knowingly changed his appearance *during the murder*. Upon first attacking Kitty and issuing two stab wounds to the back, a bystander who heard the screams called out to Moseley to leave her alone, and Moseley fled, leaving her injured to make her way to her front door from her car. Ten minutes later, he returned with a new hat and ended Kitty's life. When this information came to light in court, the jury deliberated that he could not be insane because in altering his appearance, he showed that he knew the consequences of his actions.

Humans can be terrifying creatures when they succumb to their darkest inner thoughts. Yet there is also something intriguing about examining these thoughts and knowing you must conceal them from the world. We are fascinated by human behavior so different from our own, which is why there is such a deep love of horror and true crime. Costuming and disguises play a significant role in that captivation. In feeling the clothing against your skin, the weight of the mask on your head, the experience becomes visceral, and you can easily become lost in it. To kill as they do in these films, murderers must lose their humanity. 💀

SCREAM

PHOTOS COURTESY: BEARDED SKULLS MUFX GROUP / RICK POUR

BY BEARDED SKULLS MUFX GROUP

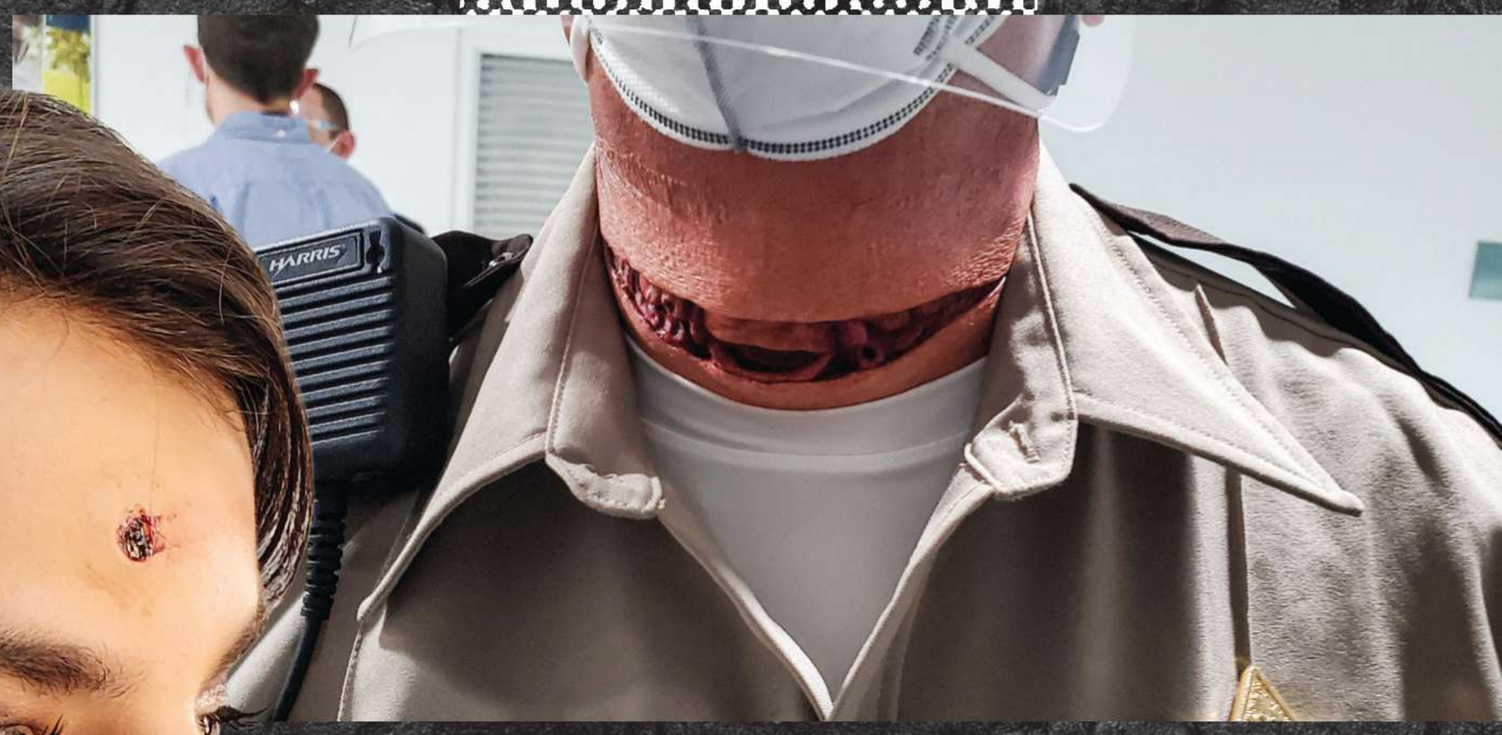
When Richie (Jack Quaid) met his fate in a stunning turn of events, he donned a bald cap material-encapsulated silicone throat slash, a quick Bondo bullet hit, and brains made from chunks of banana drenched in blood. Yum!

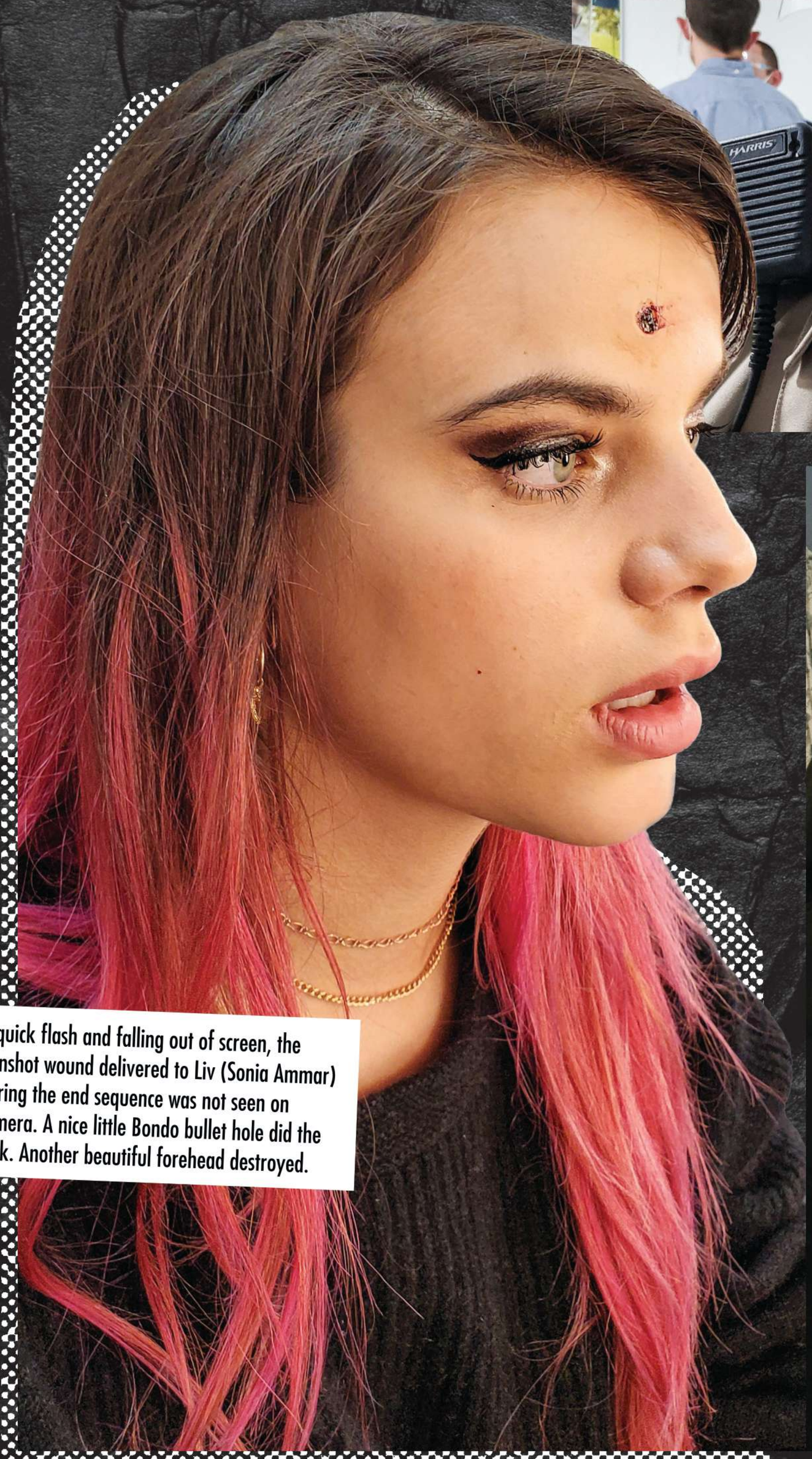
Here you have Jack with makeup artists Jeff Goodwin and Tony Rosen. What's bigger and brighter: Jack's smile, or the slash in his neck? Appliances were made by Tony and applied by Tony and Jeff.

Amber's (played by the beautiful and talented Mikey Madison) burn at the end of the film also had an Easter Egg as an homage to Wes Craven. We couldn't do a burn makeup without a little nod to Mr. Craven's most famous burned character. While we didn't want to go overboard with it, we decided to sculpt Amber's ear based off Freddy Krueger's.

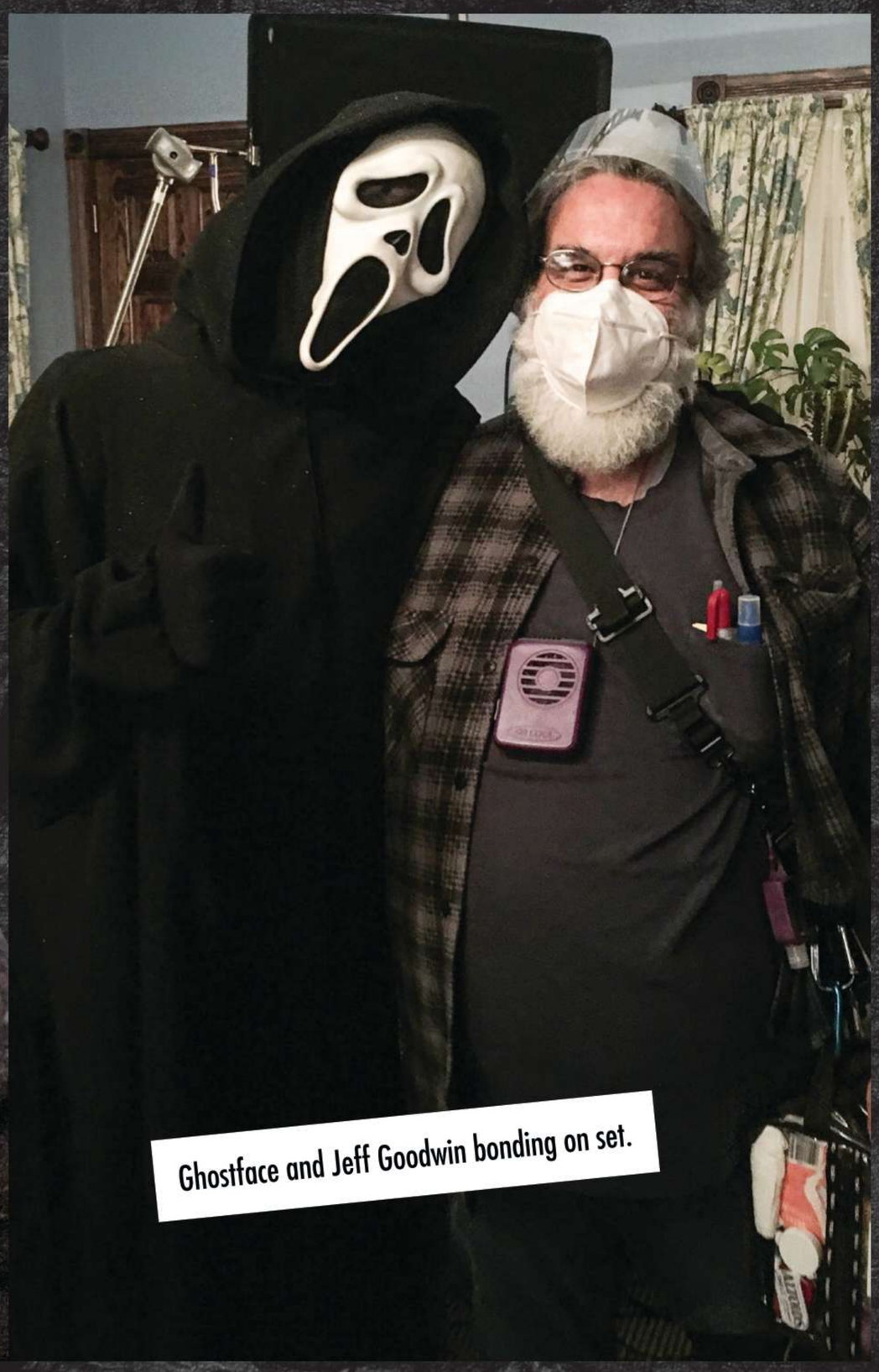
The sculpts and appliances were designed and created by Tony Rosen. Makeup was applied by Tony Rosen and Rick Pour.

The hospital security guard neck slashes were particularly violent. Showing the inner workings here, which can oftentimes get washed out or completely erased by excessive blood coverage at camera. This gag drew a lot of attention on set. These are before and after the blood pumping, gurgling, and last breath taken by our friend Rob Fortunato as seen in the movie. There's nothing to see here… just a guy missing a chunk of his neck.





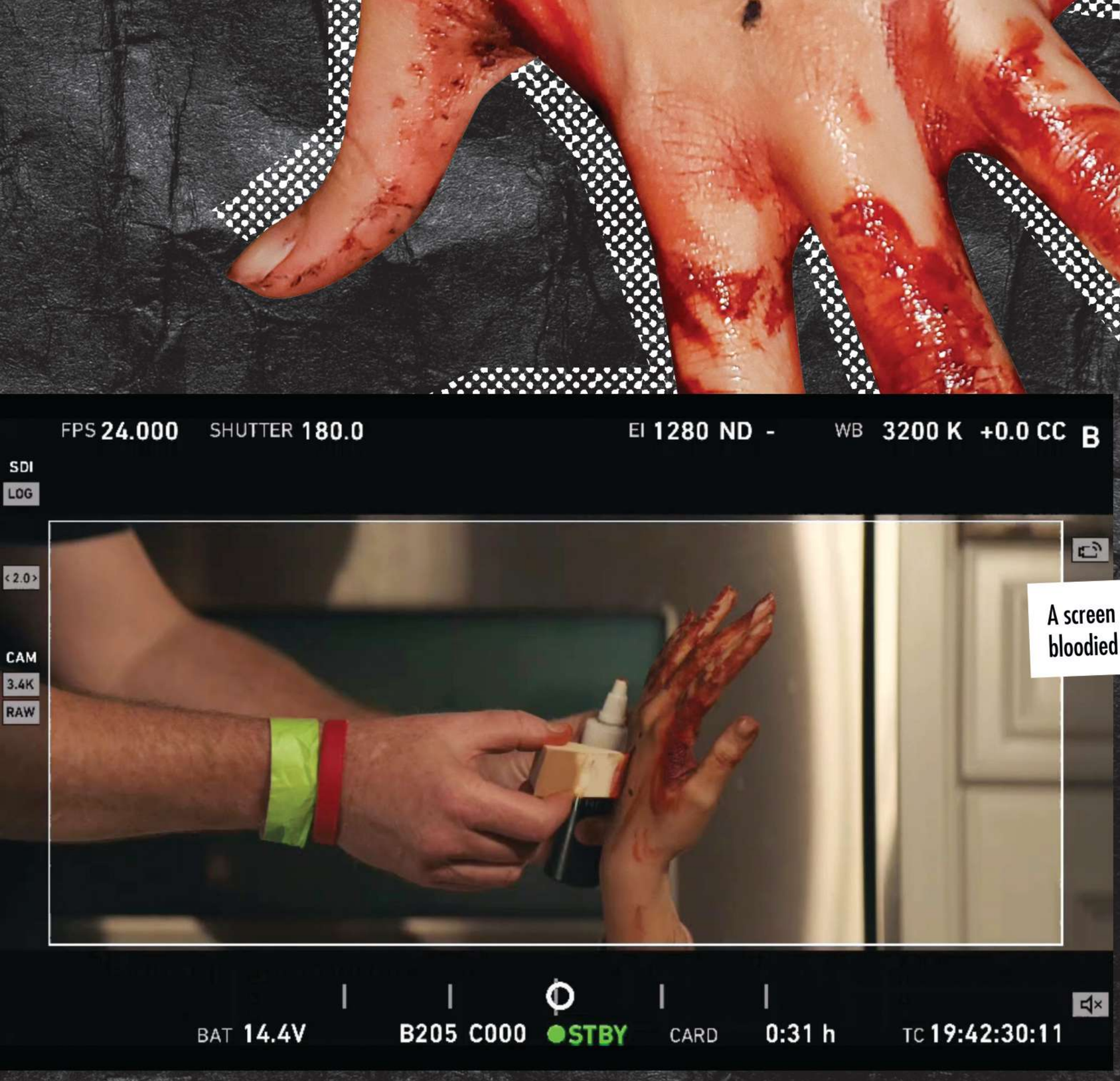
A quick flash and falling out of screen, the gunshot wound delivered to Liv (Sonia Ammar) during the end sequence was not seen on camera. A nice little Bondo bullet hole did the trick. Another beautiful forehead destroyed.



Ghostface and Jeff Goodwin bonding on set.

PHOTOS COURTESY: BEARDED SKULLS MUFX GROUP / RICK POUR

The hand stab wound, applied by Jason Willis to the insanely talented Jenna Ortega, with the reference marks for VFX. This was seen in the cringeworthy opening sequence, during the struggle with Ghostface. Between the cover of Fango #15 and this, poor Jenna's hands have taken a beating!



A screen grab of the hand stab wound being bloodied up a little bit just before a take.

These pictures show the creation of a truly horrific *Scream* kill – Wes' (Dylan Minnette) neck stab. The blade punching through Wes' neck was practical FX from front to back. VFX did the "erase and reveal" trick while the blade was slowly pushed through the appliance wound openings by Ghostface. The flexible blade followed a specially designed channel through the inside of the neck and punched out through the back with no remorse. This shot made for another tense, cringeworthy moment, and was one of our favorite FX gags in the film. Not sure about you, but we just couldn't look away while it was happening!

Twin Temple

BRINGING THE DEVIL BACK TO DOO-WOP

BY MALLORY O'MEARA

In today's world, there aren't many places where you can feel like you're inside a classic horror movie. If you're in Southern California, you could hop on the train at Universal and take their Studio tour. If you've got the airline points, you perhaps could book yourself into a drafty Airbnb in a Romanian castle. Or you could buy a ticket to see Twin Temple live.

PHOTO: HARRY EELMAN

twintemple
Present a Collection of Live (and Undead) Recordings from Their Satanic Ritual Chamber...
"Stripped from the Crypt"
MONO

On vinyl and on stage, it's Alexandra and Zachary James – Twin Temple.

PHOTO: JOSHUA ESAN

Hailing from Los Angeles, the married pair Alexandra and Zachary James have been creating Satanic doo-wop since 2017. The moment their debut album was released in 2019, Twin Temple quickly earned the devotion of fans hungry for their unique sound. While their songs showcase Alexandra's sultry vocals and Zachary's fiendish guitar skills, they also showcase the band's love of dark theatrics. Jeweled goblets of blood and ritual chanting, for instance, are beloved staples of a Twin Temple show.

For aesthetic inspiration, Alexandra and Zachary draw heavily on decadent period horror from the 1960s. Movies such as, "*House on Haunted Hill* and *Masque of the Red Death*," says Alexandra. "I love that there was a time period where The Ronettes were playing and *Masque of the Red Death* was in theaters and beehives were across the board. That's kind of like my happy place."

"We're extremely influenced by all the Hammer Films," adds Zachary. "All the Italian films, as well." adds Alexandra. "I mean, like, *Mask of Satan*. I think my fucking gender is a scorned witch who comes back after years and murders everyone."

The two have identified as horror lovers since childhood. "I remember distinctly as a kid, I felt like the Addams family, right?" Alexanda says. "To me, [we were] this normal American family to a degree, like there's nothing that different about us. But to everyone else, we're like these freaky freaks that live in the black Victorian on the hill. I'm first generation here, born in America. My parents came here in the '80s from different countries and I'm of mixed race background. And so growing up, I distinctly remember being different, feeling different, like filling out school forms that are like, 'What race are you?' And there's no box. It's like, 'Select one.' And there's nothing to describe who I was. I distinctly remember when I was six years old, our neighbor was yelling racial threats and death threats over the fence... So from very early on, some of my earliest memories about identity and self were like, 'Oh, we are the people on the other side of the fence. We are the neighbors that don't fit in with everyone else on the street that we live in.'"

Turning to horror at an early age led both of them to the world of blood and gore. "I used to want to do special effects, like masks and makeup." says Zachary, who would pick up copies of FANGORIA at comic shops as a kid. "Growing up, I loved Lon Chaney and all the early horror stuff and was really obsessed. For a time, that was something I wanted to pursue, and I was really young, like a pre-teen and shit."

Maybe getting covered in blood for Satan is the next best thing. The wickedly talented pair are practicing Satanists and the rituals they weave into their performances are anything but a gimmick. These two are true scholars of the occult. They have found that it's the perfect space to marry their love of music and horror, and their personal beliefs.

Alexandra says, "That's what witchcraft and the occult – in my opinion – has always been about, shedding constraining religious beliefs

and ways you have to act that society imposes upon you and instead, elevating yourself and finding what works for you and finding a community…" Zachary agrees, "Yeah, and I feel like horror films and music have always used that to the same end. They go hand in hand."

"Horror, fundamentally, is drawing on our fears, right?" says Alexandra. "And a lot of society's fears are, I think, based around fear of the other, fear of women, fear of women's sexuality, fear of other cultures and races. That's a very strong undercurrent that horror seeks to explore, but also subvert. In my world, it's all part and parcel of the same kind of vibe. I see horror as like the punk of film. It's very transgressive and it's meant for an outsider person. It just unites all the Satanic freaks or anyone who even has kind of disdain towards mainstream culture and its limitations."

They might be the first (and so far, only) doo-wop band to croon about Lucifer, but they insist that the devil has always been in the genre. Says Alexandra: "The innovators of this music were people of color, and art by people of color, it gets devalued. When Elvis does it or a white person does it, all of a sudden it's important. But when black people do it, it's shoved to the back of the record store. And all of a sudden this super influential band is just shoved to the sidelines, and was absolutely demonized during the time. We're bringing the devil back to doo-wop." Zachary laughs, "Yeah, we're giving the people what they wanted all along."

"I mean, you hear 'Why Do Fools Fall in Love' today, right?" Alexandra says. "And it sounds like the fucking softest teen bop in the world… but you have to remember that he [Frankie Lymon] danced with a white woman maybe for the first time in American TV history and got the entire fucking show banned because of that at the time, so there was a lot of social change tied up with this music. Honestly, the status quo and the powers that be hated that a black teenager was making all this money and dancing with white people and tearing down the divides, like Jim Crow Laws of the South, and this was not okay. Fats Domino's 'Blueberry Hill,' it sounds so sweet, but people were fucking violently attacking him outside of his hotel room for playing scat music." Zachary adds: "It was causing riots."

Alexandra continues, "This music was fucking shit up at the time, and so I guess we're just trying to bring back the glory days when a good six, eight spoken part could really fuck people's worlds up."

What are the world's only Satanic doo-wop band's favorite depictions of Satan from horror films? "That is really hard." says Alexandra. "There's lots of different Satans for me… I mean, *Devil Rides Out*. That Baphomet costume is just sick. That's kind of like a forever mood, *Devil Rides Out*."

"I really like *Angel Heart*," adds Zachary.

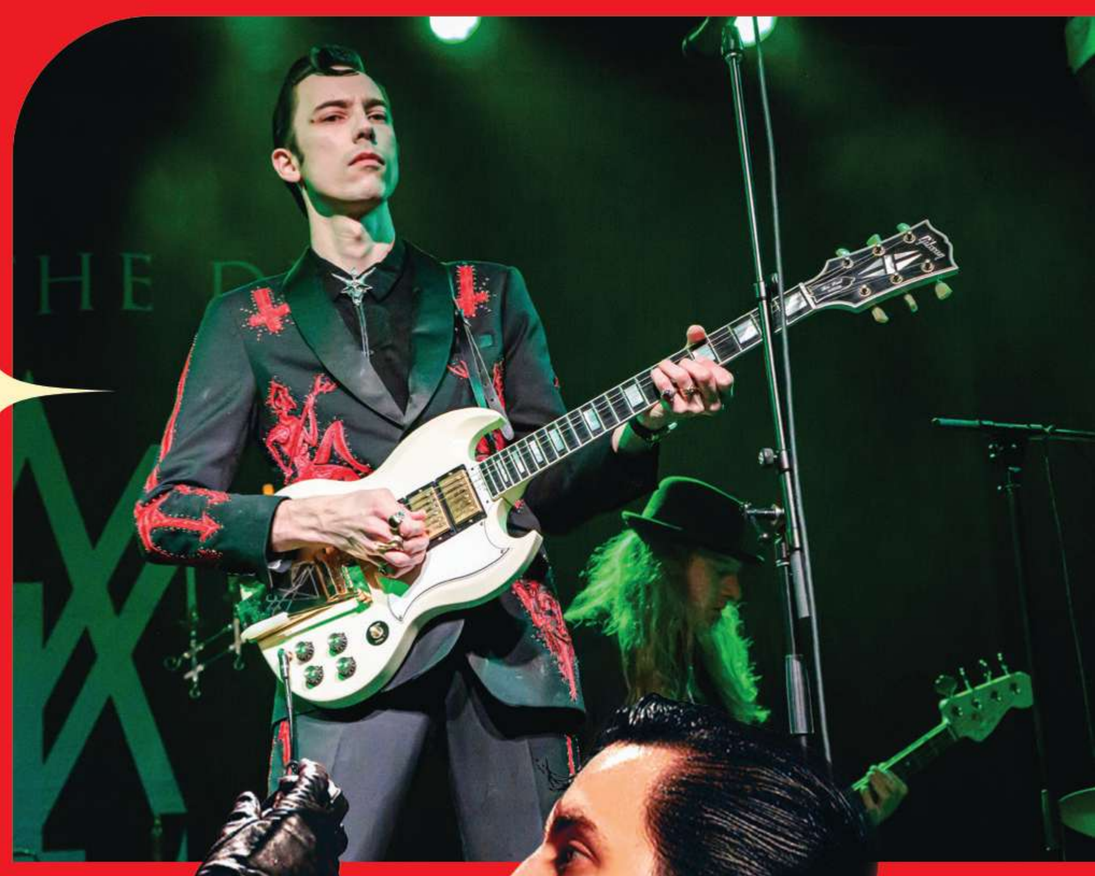
And what does Twin Temple have to offer horror fans? "It's about that place for outsiders to congregate around the things that they love. And in our case, it's sacrificing virgins and drinking blood and burning down the patriarchy and–"

"Orgies." Zachary interrupts.

"Satanic orgies." Alexandra confirms.

And of course, the most important thing for horror fans: "Blood." says Alexandra. "Lots of blood." 💀

THE WICKEDLY TALENTED PAIR ARE PRACTICING SATANISTS AND THE RITUALS THEY WEAVE INTO THEIR PERFORMANCES ARE ANYTHING BUT A GIMMICK.



Twin Temple practice what they preach.

PHOTO: JOSHUA ESAN

PHOTO: HARRY EELMAN

The Aesthetics of Prejudice

Loving Stories That Don't Love Us Back

By Dr. Rachel Knightley

Way back in the mists of 1997, shortly after finishing my GCSEs, I heard a former teacher disclose that I was the reason my class hadn't been allowed to study *The Merchant of Venice*. I had no problem with their choosing a different Shakespeare play; it was the other side of their reasoning that continues to chill me. It was fine to study an antisemitic text (as had the class above mine, and the class above them), so long as nobody Jewish was in the room.

I'm a left-handed Jewish vegan dyspraxic female horror writer. In a variety of ways, all of them invisible, my normal is the common "other." This can prompt responses borne of misunderstanding, such as, "How can you have a learning difficulty if you have a PhD?" or the classic, "I didn't know you were [insert any of the above]," as if one should expect to tell by looking. Then there's the gratuitous opposite: the friend who keeps reminding me they eat meat and I don't, or the theatre professional who began our every conversation with an impression of a "Jewish voice." But worse by far than discomfort is discounting. My favorite example comes from when I worked for a national newspaper in London. A journalist who struggled with two substantial invisible things of his own – alcoholism and depression – proclaimed entirely without irony that he "didn't believe in dyspraxia," my invisible thing. Prejudice works like our internal organs work: we don't notice what isn't hurting us.

The aesthetics of prejudice are lessons learnt wordlessly. From heroines needing male rescuers to physically unappealing villains and onwards, the stories around which we weave our experience of the world have shown-not-told us to expect good and bad to be recognizable on sight. Aesthetics enter far deeper and faster than the analytical mind can keep up with, so visual lessons are emotionally digested with thoughtless ease. My lifelong love of his-and-hers eyeliner almost certainly began with watching *Labyrinth* and *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* as a child; so, too, did the idea that being or acquiring the sex object was not the prize so much as self-knowledge and self-reliance. To me, Jareth and Frank weren't heroes. Jareth was a bad guy for taking Sarah's baby brother (even if she asked him to); Dr. Frank-N-Furter was a bad guy less for the non-consensual sex with his guests than for how he treated those who served him. What I saw was Sarah and Riff Raff growing in strength and identity into the people they could become, learning to play themselves instead of their victimhood.

But other brands are, of course, available: it's just as accurate to see Jareth grooming an underage girl and Riff Raff as a multiple-murderer. Whatever we argue consciously, our arguments are set dressing to our deeper, more primal experience. "There are two operations going on when you experience a film," says Professor Patricia MacCormack, author of *Cinesexuality*. "One is reading the signifiers… the ethics. The other is the visceral act of desire stirred within. That literally bypasses the brain, and that's why I can say I think *Labyrinth* is a really unethical film, but I'll defend *Rocky Horror* because I love it."

Vision is the primary sense for humans, as sound is for bats: what we cannot detect with our primary sense is, of itself, a potential threat. But if something is a threat to someone else, it doesn't figure so prominently on our radar. While gore and violence are as visible as visible gets, prejudice and assumption are easier to overlook from the outside, to not have to peer at too closely. It's helpful not to feel too guilty about whoever's being scapegoated, because at least it isn't us. "What if," asks Reverend Peter Laws in *The Frighteners: Why We Love Monsters, Ghosts, Death And Gore*, "the reason our culture is full of art and stories depicting cruel murder, humiliation and violence is not just because we're exercising our vital fear muscles [which we need for survival] but because we're incredibly insecure, and one of the only ways we can feel safe and strong is to see others become the very opposite?" Prejudice, like any form of bullying, separates self from other, creates a convenient scapegoat or monster: an "other" to define self against.

The very draw of prejudice is this offer of false simplicity, the convenient "other" to serve as scapegoat. While horror has been guilty of grabbing that convenience with both hands to support its storylines ("Black characters often don't survive in slasher movies," Laws points out to me, "and the 'house built on an Indian burial ground' trope has a casual prejudice about it. It suggests those dead are more vengeful, more savage and more prone to choose supernatural solutions than white burial grounds who are willing to stay politely dead"), it is also uniquely placed to explore the tendency itself, as the unpleasantly integral aspect of humanity it is. Prano Bailey-Bond's *Censor* is set in the 1980s moral panic around "video nasties," when the evidence that violent criminals had not even seen the films their crimes were being blamed on was shunned in favor of having such a convenient scapegoat to blame and suppress. This is background to the main character's story, focusing on the reality of how suppression works on the human emotions. As the censor herself is forced to discover how the suppressed bubbles up more surely than the explored, we see contemporary news footage of Thatcher's government destroying towns and communities, industries and lives: a greater and more powerful danger than the cheap

The stories around which we weave our experience of the world have shown-not-told us to expect good and bad to be recognizable on sight.

People will look the other way for "problematic faves" like *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (previous spread), *Labyrinth* (below left), and *Lady Frankenstein* (below); meanwhile, *Censor* explores the real-life scapegoating of horror.

PHOTO COURTESY OF MAGNET RELEASING

gore that was the convenient target for the fear. Scapegoating, then and now, is an easy way to blame what's outside for what's inside.

But what about when stories we grew up loving specify that we aren't invited to the party? My own relationship with the works of M.R. James, G. K. Chesterton, P.G. Wodehouse and T.S. Eliot came with an inbuilt disconnect that was autopilot long before the *Lady Frankenstein* screening (though obviously when we get to 1971 it's far harder to stomach, as is my generation's incredulity around the openly anti-Semitic Roald Dahl, and our reluctance to take another look at the images that are so much a part of our innocence). If I wanted to take what was wonderful from nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature – and I did – it could only ever be while championing "death of the author," the conscious rejection of the opinions and biographical details of the creator, choosing to see the work in its own light rather than in theirs. By religion and by gender, even as I read about the human condition and felt seen, I knew I was reading the point of view of a mind that precluded me.

While aesthetics are lessons learnt wordlessly, improving the situation affords no such luxury. We cannot learn from what we are not permitted to witness, and rather than take the moral panic line against the "video nasties" or the proto-cancel-culture approach of my former school to *The Merchant of Venice*, where I have found meaningful pushback is from seeing and naming the evil, right along with the good, learning what is learnable from both and imagining future eras reading, and watching, our own moral shortcomings. Just as it took longer than it should for *The Merchant of Venice* to be considered a problematic text, so it's up to us now to write and film our way towards a world where depictions of gender, race, religion and ability can be looked back on with the same level of horror. 💀

SOAK

A 17-YEAR-OLD'S FIRST FEATURE IS A TIMELY VAMPIRE ALLEGORY.

BY BRETT GALLMAN

PHOTOS COURTESY MUTINY PICTURES

THE FILM IMAGINES VAMPIRISM NOT AS AN AFFLICTION, BUT RATHER AS A MEANS OF ESCAPE.

For horror enthusiasts, the genre's past has an inescapable gravity, pulling audiences back with fond memories of bygone eras. However, there's another, perhaps less heralded impulse to look ahead and scan the horizon for the next big thing. In theory, the "future of horror" often exists as an abstract, something forever waiting to emerge. In reality, the future is now, as tomorrow's filmmakers are already among us, many of them crafting movies at an age when most of us were worried about passing math tests.

One of those *wunderkinds* is Alice Maio Mackay, a 17-year-old Australian who bridges the genre's past to its future with *So Vam*. Mackay steps directly into the decades-long conversation, imagining vampirism not as an affliction, but rather as a means of escape for a marginalized LGBTQIA+ community looking to break free from restrictive, conservative trappings.

Kurt (Xai) harbors dreams of becoming a drag queen, an ambition that isn't exactly encouraged by his small hometown. Accompanied by his best friend, Katie (Erin Paterson), he endures a trio of homophobic mean girls at school, only to come home to a tense relationship with his father (Brendan Cooney). An unlikely escape emerges when a predatory vampire (Chris Asimos) attacks Kurt, nearly killing him before a group of friendly bloodsuckers rescue him and induct him into their undead legion. They're also a proudly LGBTQIA+ brood that encourages Kurt to be his true self, all while providing him an outlet to strike back at intolerance as they feast on various bigots.

In *So Vam*, Kurt's journey becomes a coming-of-age allegory highlighting the struggle of LGBTQIA+ youth to flourish in such a repressive environment. The film shows an awareness of its place within the vampire canon early on, when its characters discuss the historical connection between queerness and vampire fiction, particularly Bram Stoker's *Dracula*.

For Mackay, embracing that tradition and repurposing it as an empowering mythos was only natural since vampirism is one of her favorite sub-genres. "There've also been a lot of homoeroticism and queer themes present in previous vampire works," she says, adding, "I think there was really no other choice for me than to use these supernatural creatures as a device and allegory for the LGTBQIA+ experience."

So Vam also has personal roots for Mackay, whose experience as a trans woman is reflected in Kurt's longing to find acceptance. "Like a lot of my work, it's a very personal film and there are definitely experiences, feelings, and aspirations that Kurt goes through that mirror some aspects of my life," she tells Fango.

The vampire mythos in particular allowed her to "explore the notion of found family, which can be very important for members of the LGBTQIA+ community." Kurt doesn't just find love in a relationship with

Above and opposite: The transformation of Kurt (Xai) is central to *So Vam*.

Bottom: Chosen family: Kurt with April (Grace Hyland) and Harley (Iris Mcerlean).

Andy (Tumelo Nthupi) but finds belonging with an extended family. April (Grace Hyland), a trans woman, serves as a mentor, guiding him through this strange new world of vampirism.

Like other tales before it, *So Vam* insists that its freshly-turned vampire must feed. However, it also treats this as an empowering rite of passage rather than a monstrous burden. April and her group of vigilante vamps do not target innocent victims, choosing instead to seek out virulent bigots, from white supremacists to homophobic conversion therapists. Mackay's film upends the dynamic as Kurt's arc takes him from enduring micro- and macro-aggressions to gleefully feasting on racists and homophobes while on his way to realizing his drag dreams. The film is unrepentant in its refusal to compromise: its queer community isn't simply out for equality, it's out for blood.

Despite this, though, *So Vam* remains nuanced in its treatment of Kurt's actual family, particularly his father, who is supportive of his lifestyle. However, Kurt's brother, a homophobe accused of sexual assault, complicates the picture because the father also feels compelled to support this son, leading to a volatile situation at home. While Mackay admits this complex portrayal of a parental figure wasn't initially a priority, it developed while writing the script.

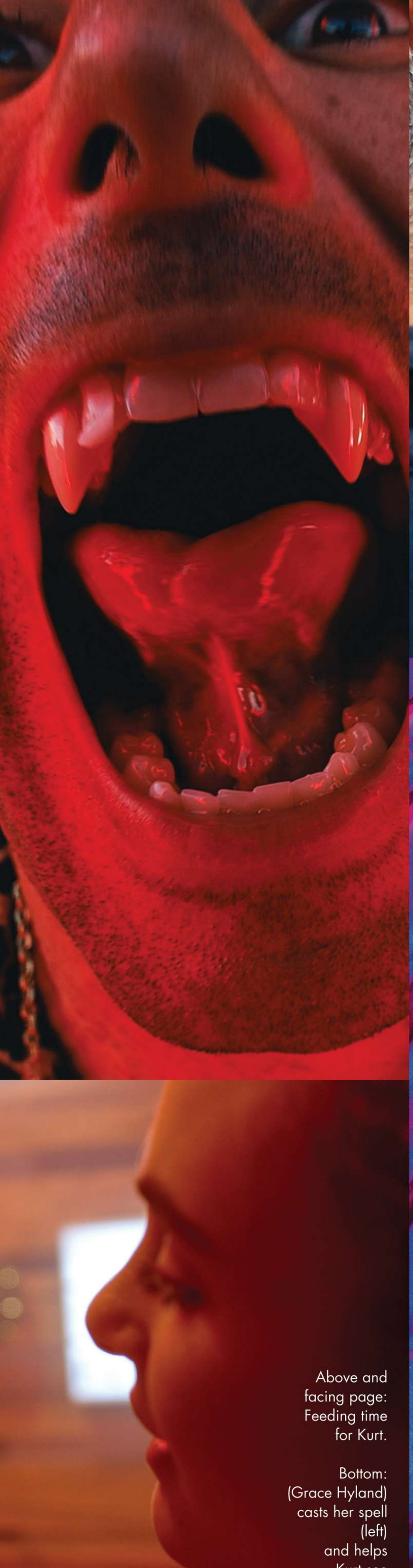
"I think the father/child relationship just developed into the story naturally, and I think a lot of the time it's probably more realistic to have a more fleshed-out relationship rather than just having this character be flat out homophobic or fully accepting," she says. "I think there was definitely a middle ground we wanted to explore. Not to justify or defend the father's perspective or actions at all, but just to highlight that kind of nuance."

One of Mackay's priorities with *So Vam* was to celebrate drag culture, a corner of the LGBTQIA+ community she feels hasn't been represented to its full potential. Her film doesn't shy away from it, as it boasts a pair of lengthy sequences that transport the audience to genuine drag performances. "I think a lot of more mainstream queer films sometimes water down the content for straight audiences," she says, adding, "I really wanted to showcase the drag and artistry in these performances."

Mackay also prides herself on the authenticity of *So Vam*'s exploration of drag culture, starting with casting Xai as Kurt. "Casting wise, it was really important to me that a queer drag queen/artist have the role, to fully understand the nuance and art in the culture," she explains.

According to Mackay, that mantra extended to featuring trans and queer musicians on the soundtrack and the supporting cast. She spotlights local artists, including one with a link to the culture's past. "One of them is actually an original member of the Les Girls, a group of transgender performers in the '70s," she says. "Working with her was a really phenomenal experience."

In addition to drag culture, *So Vam* takes its cue from numerous



SO VAM'S QUEER COMMUNITY ISN'T SIMPLY OUT FOR EQUALITY – IT'S OUT FOR BLOOD.

cinematic influences in horror and beyond. Mackay cites teen vampire favorites like *The Lost Boys*, *Vampire Academy*, *Twilight*, and the original *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* — particularly their camp aspects — as her film's precursors. Meanwhile, the films of Gregg Araki and John Waters, as well as Fenton Bailey and Randy Barbato's *Party Monster* were also influential. All of these disparate influences share a campiness that Mackay wanted to harness for her film.

"I knew throughout the whole process of developing the film that I wanted [it] to be super camp, colorful, and hyper-stylized," she explains. "Even when it comes to the time period, I wanted to combine a camp and retro aesthetic, but also with a mix of modern sensibilities. Hence why it's kind of set in an ambiguous time."

Given Mackay's age, I naturally wondered what it must be like to produce a film as a teenager, only to discover that it's already old hat for her after producing several short films while balancing everyday responsibilities. She started developing the idea for *So Vam* during 11th grade, which turned out to be the only stage in production that required her to worry about school-related duties, since she shot the film over a long holiday break. Ironically, she notes, a lot of the production occurred at school during this time, putting her on a journey that ended with *So Vam* premiering at the Salem Horror Fest, an ideal destination according to the director.

"Having the film premiere at Salem Horror Fest was an absolutely amazing experience and such an honor," she says. "I think it really allowed the film to reach its intended audience, who I think appreciate queer horror more, which isn't always the case within the horror community."

Mackay lauds festival director Kay Lynch, who is an executive producer on her next film, *Bad Girl Boogey*, for providing a platform for *So Vam* and other queer horror. "Kay is an incredible festival director, and I'm incredibly thankful for her support," says the filmmaker.

This sense of community reflects Mackay's goals with *So Vam*, a film that doesn't just feature the LGBTQIA+ experience but seeks to embrace it. "At the end of the day, for my first feature I just really wanted to include everything that I was really passionate about/love and put it in this film," Mackay says. "Drag queens, vampires, strong trans and queer leads, and what I hope comes across as an authentic queer coming-of-age story that people in the community can relate to." 💀

Above and facing page: Feeding time for Kurt.

Bottom: (Grace Hyland) casts her spell (left) and helps Kurt see the light.

SEX DEMON

THE DEVIL MAKES HIM DO IT IN THIS PREVIOUSLY LOST ADULT HORROR FLICK.

BY SEAN ABLEY

When adult film historian and archivist Elizabeth Purchell met a Manhattan film collector in June 2021 for a possible collection buy, she had no idea she was about to discover her X-rated white whale. Contained within the collection was a certain early gay horror homage she'd only read about, but was desperate to screen. "A lot of my work involves primary sources — newspapers, magazines, stuff like that — and from the very first second I saw its iconic ad, I knew I had to see it," explains Purchell, who hosts the *Ask Any Buddy* podcast, a deeper dive companion to her feature length sex film fantasia of the same name.

THE ORIGINS OF GAY HORROR CAN BE FOUND IN THE TOMBS OF XXX-RATED GRINDHOUSE THEATERS IN NYC

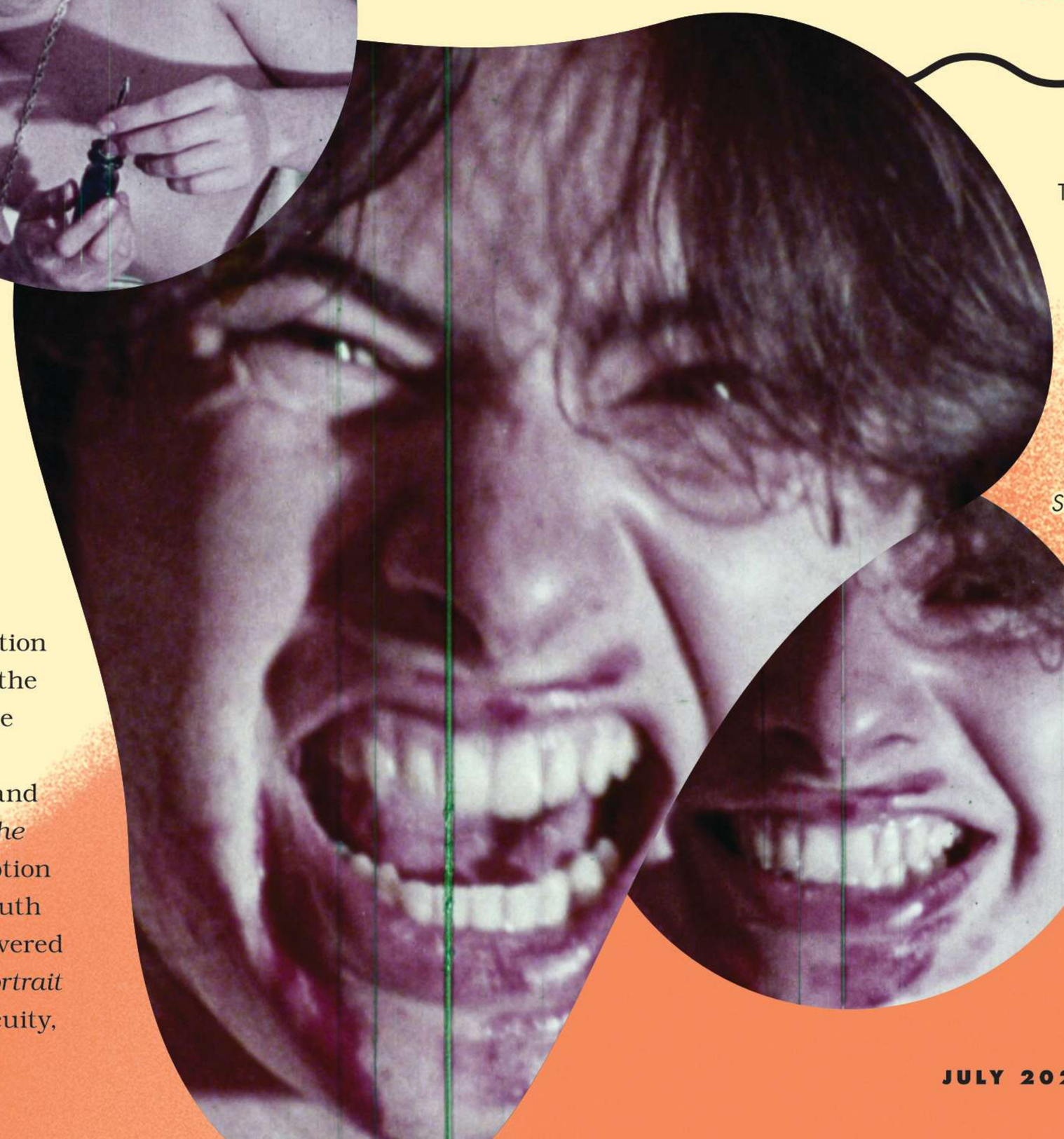
Purchell's skin flick Moby Dick was *Sex Demon*, the *Exorcist*-inspired gay porn feature from 1975, directed by J.C. Cricket. The plot involves Jim (Steve Spahn), who transforms into the titular character after his lover John (Jeff Fuller) gifts him an antique medallion for their anniversary. John scores the jewelry from a secondhand shop, not knowing there's a note in the medallion's original box that literally reads, "THIS MEDALLION IS CURSED." The shop owner burns the note without telling John, and dooms Jim to a life of possessed penis procurement.

It's no coincidence that so many of the early gay adult films like *Sex Demon* incorporate full storylines. Until very recently, mainstream cinema was bereft of queer representation in any substantive way, and certainly gay relationships, if portrayed at all, were either tragic or ridiculously comic. Before indie queer cinema truly caught on as a genre in the mid-1980s, the first place gay men saw themselves onscreen in loving relationships was gay porn. Likewise, as queer horror becomes more and more of a "thing," with the upcoming Shudder documentary series *Queer for Fear: A History of Queer Horror* and a handful of academic reference books being released in 2022 (including one edited by this writer), research shows the origins of gay horror can be found in the tombs of XXX-rated grindhouse theaters in NYC (and now the film labs of distributors with unpaid bills).

The limited outlets for exploration of the gay experience often led to the community's issues folded into the horror sex films: Narcissism in Michael Zen's *Falconhead* (1976) and the superior *Falconhead Part II: The Maneaters* (1984); sin and redemption in *The Destroying Angel* (1976); youth obsession in *Gayracula* (1983) (covered in *Fango* V.2 Issue 12) and *The Portrait of Dorian Gay* (1974); and promiscuity, intergenerational couples, and addiction in *Sex Demon*. "One of the things I find so interesting about Sex Demon is the way it tackles [the monogamy vs. promiscuity] issue; using a demonic possession as a metaphor for hookup culture and all of the danger that it entails," offers Purchell. "In that way, it's much closer to *Abby* than it is to *The Exorcist* — which is great because I think the former is the better film."

And to that point, although the early ads for *Sex Demon* clearly state "A takeoff on '*Exorcist*,'" the film doesn't involve a child (thank goodness!). Instead, the film follows a possessed adult as he wreaks havoc on his partner and other gay men he picks up and attempts to fill with his unholy spirit. After blood and semen find their way onto the medallion, Jim dreams of an orgy that plays out like a Satanic ritual (a scene notable for the racial diversity of its participants.) Later that night John discovers Jim eating raw meat out of the refrigerator. From that point on each sexual encounter in the film is more upsetting than the last — Jim's first sextracurricular activity as the devil's plaything begins in NYC's Gaiety Theatre's bathroom and ends in the trick's murder (with Shirley and Co.'s "Shame, Shame, Shame" playing in the background); his next is the film's most disturbing scene, where Jim sexually assaults a man then viciously stabs him in the rectum.

Unlike so many "A XXX Parody" films today, *Sex*



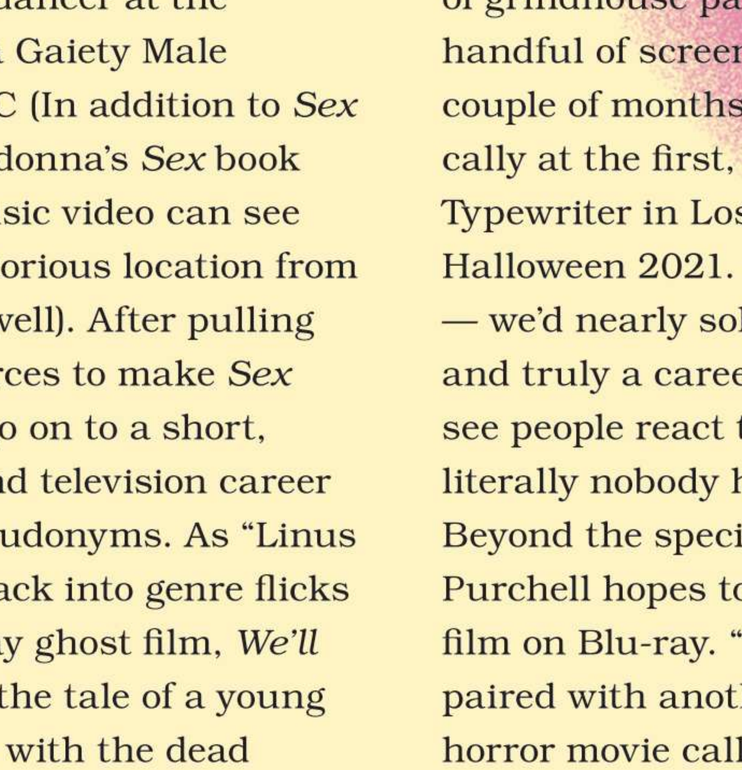
The images in this article are about all we can show you from the gay porn *Exorcist* rip-off *Sex Demon*.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF ASK ANY BUDDY

Demon isn't a comedy. There are definitely humorous moments — the "THIS MEDALLION IS CURSED" note, some highly dramatic music cues, and John's friend who enters the picture as comic relief to help him solve his demon problem — but overall, the tone is quite serious. Fully half of the sex scenes are assaults, and after the opening scenes of 1970s gay domestic bliss, watching Jim and John's relationship unravel into arguments and domestic violence is a profoundly sad experience. Spahn's performance as "John" is genuine, and his helplessness as Jim spirals out of control will feel very familiar to anyone who has lost a loved one to drugs or alcohol.

The climax of the film comes after John discovers Jim's unconscious trick with a screwdriver sticking out of his bloody rectum. John consults an exorcist (Panama Johnson), who performs an exorjizzum to no avail — there's no pea soup, but literal pee as Jim erupts in a violent rage and urinates into the exorcist's mouth. Jim appears cured, but moments later he maniacally ravishes John, flees the scene, and much like the source material, meets his tragic end on a flight of stairs.

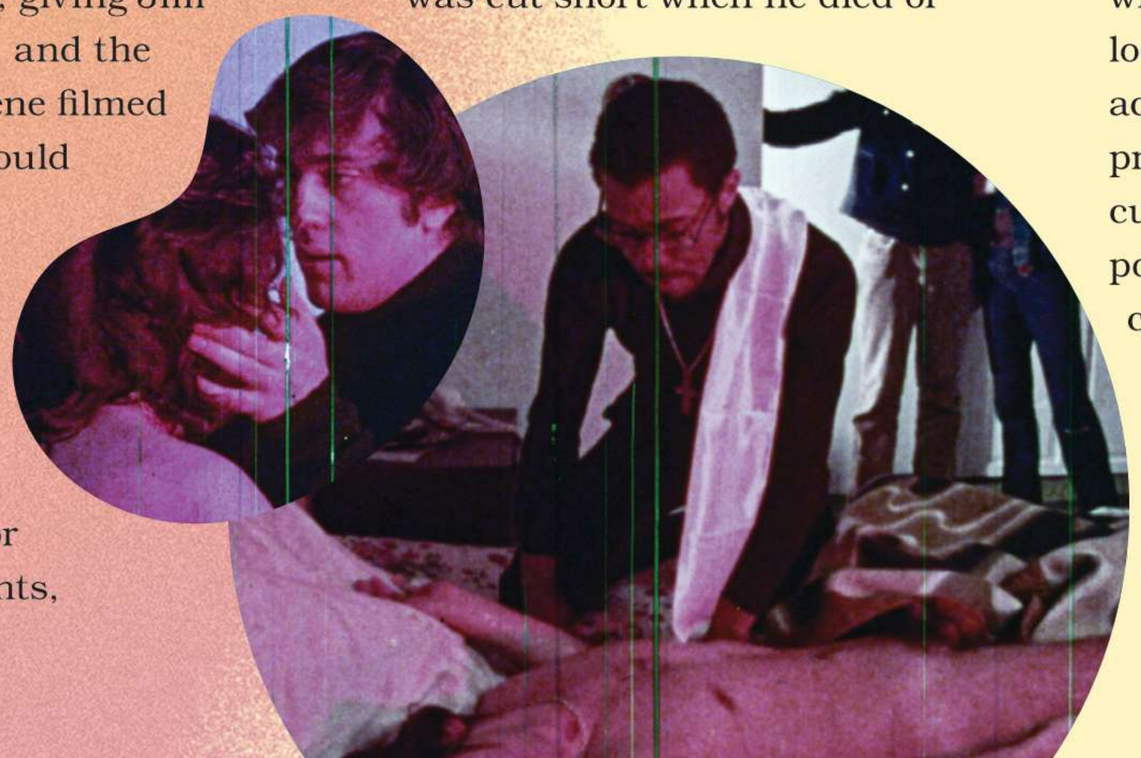
Credit must be given to first-time filmmaker Cricket for the downbeat ending — at a time when the gay community was desperate for positive representation in cinema, giving Jim some form of redemption, and the couple a make-up sex scene filmed in XXX-treme closeup, would have been an acceptable happy ending. But Jim takes that tumble down the stairs to his death, John is left to grieve, and with that Cricket has made a horror film with hardcore elements, rather than a sex flick parody.



Sex Demon was shot when Cricket was just 20 years old, making him one of the youngest content creators at the time. Previous to his film career, Cricket was Jimmy Mellow, and he worked as a go-go dancer at the Gaiety Theatre aka Gaiety Male Burlesk (sic) in NYC (In addition to *Sex Demon*, fans of Madonna's *Sex* book and her *Erotica* music video can see glimpses of the notorious location from those projects, as well). After pulling together the resources to make *Sex Demon*, he would go on to a short, but prolific, film and television career under multiple pseudonyms. As "Linus Terri," he dipped back into genre flicks with the X-rated gay ghost film, *We'll Meet Again* (1978), the tale of a young man falling in love with the dead soldier who just isn't quite ready to leave his old apartment. Mellow also was a presence on NYC's public access cable channel, directing and producing several programs including the news and variety show, *Gay Morning America* for two seasons. Sadly, like so many gay men of his generation, his promising career was cut short when he died of AIDS-related complications in 1992. "Jimminy Cricket was a true entertainer," says Purchell. "His films never had large budgets, but they were never lazily put together. *Sex Demon* is a really impressive debut — the acting, the locations, the effects, and especially the editing."

Thankfully, we still have his work to enjoy. Since unearthing *Sex Demon*, Purchell has been screening a digital preservation version of the film to enthusiastic crowds that aren't necessarily the raincoat brigade of grindhouse past. "We've done a handful of screenings over the past couple of months but I was only physically at the first, which was at Dynasty Typewriter in Los Angeles just before Halloween 2021. It was a great crowd — we'd nearly sold out the house — and truly a career highlight for me to see people react to a movie that, again, literally nobody had seen in 40 years." Beyond the special screenings, Purchell hopes to one day release the film on Blu-ray. "I'd love to release it paired with another formerly lost gay horror movie called *Deadly Blows* — it's a protoslasher that was advertised as being 'a gay *Psycho*.'"

Despite the material, there's a nostalgia to watching *Sex Demon* and films like it from the era for gay fans of horror. We're reminded that there was a time when gay men had just begun to carve out their own communities in places like NYC and San Francisco, where they felt safe to be themselves, looking toward a bright future as gay activism began to make significant progress. HIV/AIDS would of course cut that short, and there were many political setbacks to be had, but the characters of *Sex Demon* existed in a gay world where their only worry was not homophobic violence, a plague, or discrimination, but good old fashioned demonic possession. 💀



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THE CHILDREN WHO PLAYED WITH DEAD THINGS

Bob Clark and Alan Ormsby's zombie opus turns 50 this year

By Sean Abley

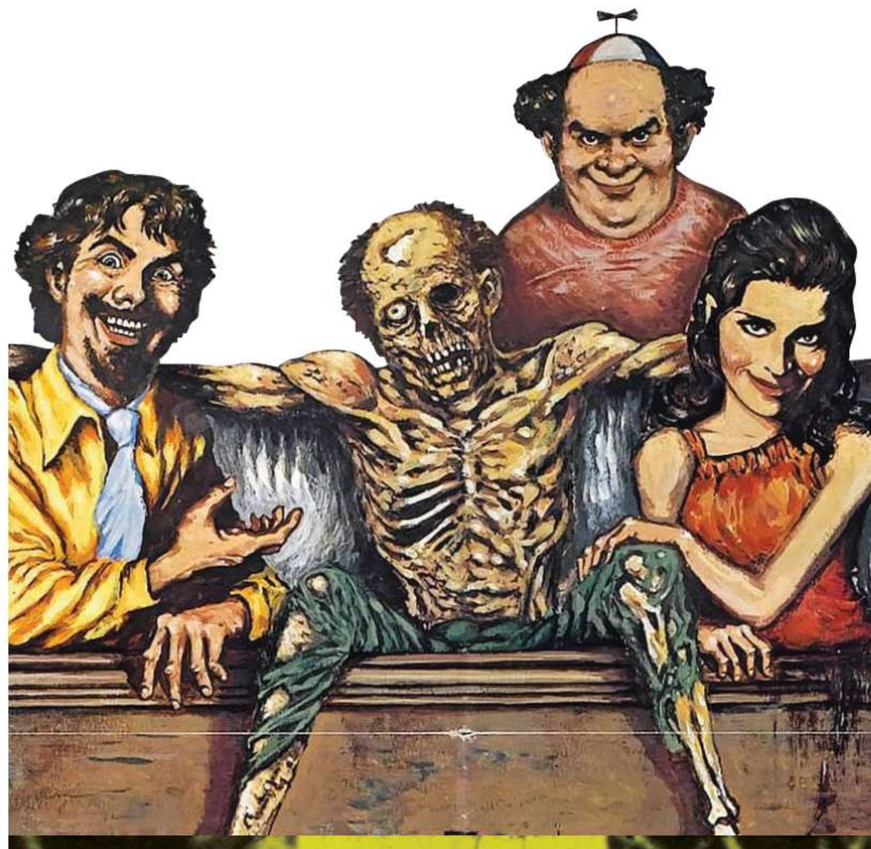
In 1972, four years after *Night of the Living Dead* changed the horror genre forever, another independent zombie flick crept into theaters, drive-ins and televisions. The film, shot on the cheap in Coconut Grove, FL, by a group of film school friends, would turn out to be an enduring, beloved and legitimately scary low-budget perennial, and a test run for two important genre filmmakers. That film, *Children Shouldn't Play with Dead Things*, turns 50 years old this year.

The plot is simple: a theater troupe, led by a flamboyant and cruel director, travels to an island off the coast of Florida for... well, that's a bit ambiguous. The director has some grand plan that involves putting his actors through a night of scares and acting challenges, and as part of that plan a corpse must be exhumed, and a ritual performed to raise the dead – which inexplicably works. Soon enough the group of theatrical archetypes are trapped in a farmhouse, fighting off zombies.

Children Shouldn't Play with Dead Things wasn't co-writer/director Bob Clark's first film – that would be 1967's unfortunately titled *She-Man: A Story of Fixation*, a tawdry, black-and-white grindhouse flick about a "violent transvestite" (as per the promotional materials at the time) blackmailing a man into taking estrogen (Clark was presumably offered the job after serving as assistant director on the race-bating classic, *Shanty Tramp*, the same year). *She-Man*, despite the premise, does show Clark to be a talented young director. So he was ready when offered a small amount of money to make a "real" film. But he had no script.

If the "zombies try to get in the house" plot sounds familiar, it should. During the *Children Shouldn't Play with Dead Things* reunion panel at the Chiller Theatre Spring 2019 convention, Alan Ormsby, who plays the aforementioned director "Alan" and co-wrote the script with Clark, explained how they came up with the idea. "I told [Bob Clark] there was a movie playing called *Night of the Living*... Why don't we go see that? We came out, and basically it was, 'Oh, well let's do something like that.' We basically ripped it off."

Despite the derivative nature of the film's genesis, *Children Shouldn't Play with Dead Things* has a grimy charm that has endured for five decades. After an opening grave-robbing sequence that serves up some genuine scares courtesy of a sparse synth soundtrack and a standard 1970s horror freeze frame, the theater troupe arrives and the games begin. Alan goads one of the actresses to



Jane Daly and Anya Ormsby, disregarding the film's title...

perform the fake resurrection ritual, and the dead come to life. And this is the point where Ormsby needs to give himself and Clark more credit for the script – the "trapped in the house, zombies outside" plot would be enough for most low-budget exploitation flicks, but Clark and Ormsby added a truly bizarre, gay necrophilia marriage subplot that is so perverse (Alan wants the company to perform a wedding between him and Orville, the exhumed corpse) the viewer either has to buy in, or be left behind. As described by Ormsby during the panel, the writing process was quick. "Bob came up with this title, which I still think is a great title. He said, 'Well I have to write it in 10 days, so I have to write 10 pages a day.' He wrote on yellow legal pads with pencil." At some point during that 10 days, Clark wasn't going to be able to bring the script across the finish line. "He said, 'I can't finish it all, I have too much to do, will you write some of it?'... So I did..." explains Ormsby.

According to Clark, *Children Shouldn't Play with Dead Things* was shot for $40,000. In this instance, the amount is a feature, not a flaw, as that low budget plus the relative inexperience of the company are what make *Children Shouldn't Play with Dead Things* so effective. True, the characters (especially Alan) grate, and the fact that the threat of being kicked out of a theater company is enough to keep the troupe participating in the director's necrophiliac insanity does strain credulity. But the film has that 1970s matte finish that made all independent horror movies of the time look like documentaries. Most of the scenes in the house are shot like police lineups – lock down the camera, wide shot, closeup, reverse, repeat – and with the exception of Ormsby, the performances all feel natural, rooted in reality, as if the cast is improvising their dialogue. After spending so much time with a group of ordinary people who are basically playing themselves in a cinéma-vérité film, the third act feels like watching the Loud family from *An American Family* being eaten by zombies. And wouldn't you know it, that gay necrophilia marriage subplot becomes the *plot* plot when, in an extremely unsettling moment, Orville, the corpse who was an unwilling pawn in Alan's homosexual death wedding fantasy, is found sitting on the bed waiting to consummate the marriage.

Of the many connected members of the *Dead Things* cast and crew (many had gone to school or worked in theater together, some had dated or were currently married to each other), a new addition to the production family was executive producer Ted V. Mikels, the legendary exploitation filmmaker who by this time had made seven other films including *The Astro-Zombies* and *The Corpse Grinders*. By far the most experienced person involved with the production, Mikels spent his time on set "suggesting" things, as explained by *Dead Things* music composer, Carl Zittrer, also part of the Chiller Theatre reunion panel. "One of the things he tried to do, he wanted the lights turned down," remembers Zittrer. "And Bob and the cameraman were afraid of turning the lights down. I remember the camera guy saying 'I don't want to lose it... But Mikels insisted, 'It's too light, it's too bright.'... We should thank him for that."

The film had minimal success upon its original release – in 1972 films like *Children Shouldn't Play with Dead Things* would be relegated to drive-ins, grindhouses and one-off weekend screenings here and there. As was the custom at the time, the film was occasionally retitled; *Things from the Dead*, *Revenge of the Living Dead*, and the puzzling *Zreaks* were all tried on for size, but thankfully the original stuck. Box office wasn't spectacular, but over the next few years television as a medium would start expanding, requiring content to fill late night and weekend programming slots, and those exploitation flicks found new life (and income streams). And truth be told, the late-late show may have been a better screening experience than the theater. There is something disturbing about watching *Dead Things* late at night in one's own home. Unlike *Night of the Living Dead*, which was filmed in black-and-white with a unique visual language, and thus a built-in psychological barrier between film and audience, *Dead Things* is in color, and shot as if the viewer is watching through the windows of a house that looks like *your* house. Even though the film is set on a Florida island, the totality of what the viewer takes in inspires a feeling of familiarity and closeness, not to mention an inescapable dread.

Beginning in the mid-'70s, the way we consumed media would change forever with home video. Thousands of

...and this is what happens.

Clark and Ormsby added a truly bizarre, gay necrophilia marriage subplot that is so perverse the viewer either has to buy in, or be left behind.

films, previously in "catch 'em or you'll miss 'em" theatrical releases, were now at moviegoers' fingertips for just a few bucks a night. *Dead Things* would lag behind, stubbornly not released on VHS until 1985 by Gorgon Video (this first release was notable for the fact that the PG-rated film, ostensibly frequently rented for horror-loving tweens by their super-cool parents, included an explicit, ultra-morbid trailer for the decidedly R-rated *Faces of Death* before the main attraction). Cut to a few years and a few physical media formats later, and *Children Shouldn't Play with Dead Things* can now be found in various DVD and Blu-ray iterations with bonus materials and commentary by a cast that sound genuinely shocked by the durability of their first movie.

Over the years, interest in remaking Clark and Ormsby's horror calling card cropped up occasionally, including productions with Tom Savini and even FANGORIA attached. "I know that around 1971 or '72, I was delivering signs I had painted to a bar, and a guy was sitting there named Forest Carpenter..." Savini explains when asked about directing the remake. "I just started talking to him and he said he had just finished [art directing] a movie called *Children Shouldn't Play with Dead Things*. And I had my make-up portfolio in the car, so I ran out and got it, showed it to him and he got me hired on *Deathdream*, [Clark and Orsmby's] second movie." Sadly, Savini's new take on an old favorite wasn't meant to be. "I eventually watched *Children Shouldn't Play with Dead Things*... I thought it was pretty cool, so I leapt at the chance to direct the sequel, but the script was horrible." Like so many Hollywood hopes and dreams, this one died and has yet to rise from the grave.

In the aftermath of their first feature together, Clark and Ormsby would go on to make several iconic horror films: they worked together on *Deathdream*; Clark directed *Black Christmas*; Ormsby wrote and directed *Deranged*, wrote the 1982 *Cat People* remake, and pseudonymously wrote and co-directed *Popcorn* (on which Clark is said to have worked as an

Sklarey takes a
well-earned rest (in peace).

uncredited producer). But apparently neither of the men, and especially Clark, had any real love for the genre. According to an interview for the website Movie Hole, when asked to make a sequel to *Black Christmas*, Clark had had enough. "I was at the end of my horror run, it was just a way to get into the movie business. Back then, you either started in porno or horror." And certainly their combined filmographies of almost 50 films, which include *Porky's*, *A Christmas Story*, *My Bodyguard*, *Mulan* and *Baby Geniuses*, are testaments to their multi-genre aspirations.

Although Clark was done with horror, there is another genre legacy for which *Children Shouldn't Play with Dead Things* can (allegedly) take credit: *Halloween*. As he told Canuxploitation.com (and several other outlets over the years), Clark met with a pre-*Halloween* John Carpenter after the success of *Black Christmas* to discuss future films. While not keen to make his own, Clark offered what he thought would be a clever direction for a subsequent holiday horror. "[I said] if I was going to do one, though, I would do a movie a year later where the killer escapes from an asylum on Halloween, and I would call it *Halloween*. As John has pointed out, the movie he was offered already had that title, and he wrote a screenplay. And then several movies ripped *Black Christmas* off."

Despite his protestations, there was one more horror movie left in Bob Clark. In the mid-2000s he was convinced to play with dead things one more time. "I'm going to do [a remake of] *Children Shouldn't Play With Dead Things* in the spring," he told Movie Hole in 2005, "That's a Monty Python version of a $40,000 film that my college buddies and I did in 1971." The sequel was announced, but sadly Clark and his son would be killed in a collision with a drunk driver in 2007.

Over the years we've lost several members of the *Dead Things* family. Jeff Gillen – who played "Jeff" in *Dead Things* and "Santa Claus" in Clark's *A Christmas Story*, wrote *She-Man* and directed *Deranged* – passed away in 1995. Valerie Mamches, Ormsby's real-life ex-girlfriend who played "Val" and raised the dead, died in 2015 after decades as a beloved acting teacher. Producer Gary Goch died in 2009. Ted V. Mikels died of cancer in 2016 after a sixty-plus year career in exploitation films. And of course, Bob... With the exception of Jane Daly, who played "Terry" and is still active with almost 150 acting credits and counting, most of the others have slowed down or retired in the 50 years since helping birth a cult classic.

But we still have the film, made by young filmmakers who dared to steal from George Romero well before "low-budget zombie flick" would become *de rigueur* for groups of friends with a camera and a vacation rental. We still have a film that features positive portrayals of queer characters in addition to the batshit crazy gay-baiting necrophiliac lead. We still have a film that delivers genuine unease and disturbing moments, despite Alan Ormsby's clown pants. And because of that film, we have the legacies of the filmmakers, and their fellow filmmakers and artists who were drawn into their orbit early in their careers, and the films they would make which not only include horror, but films of every genre including one of the most beloved Christmas films of all time. The children may have grown up (or even passed away), but thankfully they didn't listen to their own advice and played with dead things before they did. 💀

BEYOND THE TRAILER

BY MICHAEL GINGOLD

Rebecca Hall follows up *The Night House* with an even more terrifying relationship thriller – one that's been rattling fest audiences in advance of its premiere.

"I always enjoy everyone's choice of description," Rebecca Hall says as our discussion of her film *Resurrection* begins, and this writer offers a particular compliment. "'Powerful' is a good one! I've had interviews where there have been some long pauses, as they tried to work out what word they want to use to describe it all. 'Intense' or 'interesting'… all sorts, the whole gamut. 'Disturbing' comes up a lot!"

As well it should. *Resurrection*, which has been doing the 2022 fest beat (including this month's Fantasia International Film Festival) ahead of its August 5 release by IFC Films, is one that truly gets its psychological creep on. Hall (*The Night House*) plays Margaret, a pharmaceutical company executive first seen dispensing advice to an intern, Gwyn (Angela Wong Carbone), who's having relationship issues. Margaret appears to have it all together, in control of every aspect of her life – including an ongoing affair with a married co-worker and a tetchy but loving relationship with her teenage daughter Abbie (Grace Kaufman). And then, out of nowhere, her existence is upset by the sudden appearance of David (Tim Roth), whose nature is at first undefined, but whose very presence at a lecture she attends sends her into panic mode. There's evidently a very unpleasant history between them, and as *Resurrection* goes on, we find out just how distressing it was… as it begins to repeat itself.

"IT'S A DELIBERATELY PROVOCATIVE THRILL RIDE ON ONE LEVEL, AND I CAN APPRECIATE THAT IT JUST PUSHES THE ENVELOPE. IT'S SORT OF WHAT MAKES THE FILM, AND ALLOWS YOU TO APPRECIATE ITS COMPLETE INSANITY."

- REBECCA HALL

Writer/director Andrew Semans, who previously made a trio of shorts and the black-comedy feature *Nancy, Please*, taps into themes of gaslighting and emotional abuse that have been very much under discussion in recent years, while creating two indelibly specific characters in Margaret and David. He notes that *Resurrection* was partially inspired, though not directly based on, events in the life of a friend of his.

Opposite: David (Tim Roth) terrorizes Margaret (Rebecca Hall) with grisly souvenirs and nightmare memories of an infant.

"She became involved in a relationship with someone who was an extremely manipulative and dangerous, toxic personality," he recalls. "I witnessed that relationship first-hand, and did my best to understand what was happening, in an effort to help her out. In doing so, I did quite a bit of research on the psychology of abuse, and of the abuser and the victim, and what I learned was very counterintuitive and very frightening, and came to inform the story of *Resurrection* quite a bit.

"What is counterintuitive," he elaborates, "is the incredible emotional bond that can often develop between victim and victimizer in an abusive situation, through the process of trauma bonding, and how this attachment can form despite circumstances that feel extremely unhealthy. That's often so perplexing, when friends or family members are in toxic relationships: why the victim is unable to extricate him- or herself from it. That can be very, very hard to understand when you're not in it; the emotional dynamics of those relationships are deeply troubling, and often hard to grasp."

One of the most intriguing things about David's character, and what sets him apart from the typical screen stalker, is that he actually does very little in terms of overtly threatening Margaret. He doesn't even pursue her, but instead exploits her memories of their past and manipulates her into stalking him, in a sense. "That was one of the main ideas behind David," Semans says, "that he would be this very passive antagonist, who does just enough to goad Margaret into taking action herself. He never makes direct threats, is only violent in self-defense, and creates a situation where Margaret becomes obsessed with him, and feels she needs to be proactive and be the one going after him. That's key to his efforts to seduce her back into this delusion they shared many, many years ago. If he's too aggressive, she will react aggressively, and will not be in a position to even consider what he is proposing. However, if she's leading the situation, if she has some sense of a semblance of control, she'll be more responsive to what he's pitching to her. It was definitely a bit of a risk to create a villain who is so ostensibly inactive over the course of the movie, but that was something we had a lot of fun with."

That also posed a challenge for Hall, to make it clear to the audience why Margaret doesn't take more action—perhaps violently so—against this dangerous man who has re-entered her life and threatens not only her, but potentially Abbie as well. "It's hard to underestimate how big an influence someone like David can have on someone like Margaret," Hall says. "As much as she might think, in moments away from him, that she can just deal with him as quickly as possible, when she's confronted with him, there's a very different reality. And I also don't believe she's a violent person. As tough as she has made herself — as she has convinced herself she is — underneath that, there's a

Wounds old and new: David's return has immediate and calamitous results for Margaret and her daughter (Grace Kaufman).

core of quite vulnerable humanity that doesn't want to do that, that is not as capable of violence as she likes to think she is, or has tried to train herself to be."

Resurrection is also subtle, in its first act, about revealing just what transpired between Margaret and David all those years ago. There are hints, in dialogue and behavior, of what went on, but for a while, the audience is left to put together a clearer picture in their minds. Then comes one of the movie's centerpiece scenes: a transfixing seven-minute-plus monologue, delivered by Hall in a single unbroken take, in which Margaret lays out to Gwyn the full, unnerving particulars of her and David's past. Not since Robert Shaw's Quint recounted his Indianapolis experience in *Jaws*, arguably, has a genre film showcased such a lengthy, galvanizing and deeply unsettling speech.

"Monologues are something you see in stage plays all the time, but not so much in movies these days," Semans says. "And I love the idea of an expository but also cathartic kind of gush right in the middle of the film. That was inspired by *Little Murders*, a totally brilliant and weird and hilarious and very dark movie written by Jules Feiffer, directed by Alan Arkin — the only film he ever directed. Elliott Gould is one of the leads, and plays a very enigmatic character; you know very little about him. And right in the middle of the movie, he gives you his origin story in one long, uninterrupted take, and he's absolutely brilliant and riveting. I really responded to that, and I've always liked the idea of withholding, and withholding about your main character, until right about the middle, where you get all the information."

And of course, it helps to have an actress of Hall's caliber on hand to recite it. "I knew it was going to be very risky," Semans continues, "and if it wasn't delivered brilliantly, it could be extremely dull or feel too expository, but thankfully Rebecca is remarkable, and so the scene works."

Not only that, she pulled it off in the first take. "Well, I don't know what else to tell you about that, other than I'm a theater actress!" Hall says. "I once had to do a two-page monologue of completely non sequitur, almost absurdist dialogue, with no logical connections. It was in a Broadway play I did called *Machinal*, and I had to deliver it at the speed of thought, with barely any pauses, directly out to the audience. It was one of the hardest things I've ever had to do, and I had to do it every night! There was an entire group of people behind me who had a dance choreography based on where I was in the monologue, so if I messed up, their whole routine would go out of whack. Honestly, that was very good training, because nothing will be as difficult as that. This *Resurrection* scene in comparison was, 'Oh yeah, I can do this!'

"We did do it a second time for safety, which Andrew did not use," she adds. "It was funny, because the AD and the whole crew had allotted a lot of time for it, because it was this two-page

scene. And in 15 or 20 minutes, we were out of there."

Once the audience is fully aware of what once transpired between Margaret and David, it adds both an understanding of what's happening in the present, and deepens the unease regarding where it's going to go. The psychological stakes continue to be raised, and *Resurrection* gets deeper and deeper under the viewer's skin until the tension becomes practically unbearable. And then… well, even though no details will be revealed here, perhaps there should be a SPOILER ALERT anyway for the discussion of where the story eventually goes, because the film takes a sharp turn from suggestiveness and heads down a grisly and visceral avenue.

"The movie's final act, which is really bloody, felt like an inevitable extension of the story that leads up to it," Semans says. "I wanted an ending that felt cathartic, that felt explosive, that felt operatic, and that also felt psychologically and emotionally justified. Even though the very last scene is highly ambiguous, and can be interpreted in a number of ways, it was important to me to have a kind of explosive moment of redemption. And given the circumstances of the story, it had to be bloody. It felt like there was no other way to go. I also liked the idea that this is not a particularly violent movie, at least by horror and thriller standards, until the third act. I enjoyed the idea of withholding all that, and then releasing all that energy in the final minutes. I just found that to be formally satisfying."

Indeed it is, though Hall found the experience of dealing with the on-set grue and prosthetics (created by makeup effects artists Ben Bornstein and Paul Molnar) to be "So horrible! I mean, I don't have a very strong stomach; I'm pretty squeamish, actually. I can't watch massively gory films, I'm not a fan of them, so it's sort of strange to me that I ended up on set that day, doing that stuff. But it was mostly just really funny! I kept talking to the prosthetics team about how they do it. They're brilliant, the guys who make all that stuff, and it's truly pretty disgusting [*laughs*], in quite a fun way."

As for the sequence itself, Hall says, "I think there's something to be said for such an intensely cinematic ending, you know? It's a deliberately provocative thrill ride on one level, and I can appreciate that it just pushes the envelope. It's sort of what makes the film, and allows you to appreciate its complete insanity."

And even though *Resurrection*, as noted above, speaks to some very timely issues, Hall sees the movie as an entertainment first and foremost. "I look at it as pure cinema. It's an experience, you know? This is something you're going to watch and be forced into a sort of intensity that is gratifying as a viewer. There are certainly metaphors that tie it in with certain aspects of the culture; I think of it in part as a metaphor for the existential crisis of having a child. That's a sort of emotional horror; when you have a child, now there's this thing in the world that you might lose, that might die. That's a profoundly scary element of being human, and the film explores that anxiety. So there are things to talk about in *Resurrection*, if you're looking for them, but I believe it's an experience above and beyond everything else." 💀

From Satan, with Love.
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THAT TIME MERYL STREEP SPOILED A MOVIE INTO CHANGING ITS ENDING

BY MICHAEL GINGOLD

These days, any major movie going back for reshoots, especially to fix its ending, is cause for plenty of online chatter. Way back in the pre-Internet era of 1987, the more violent, audience-pleasing new conclusion added to *Fatal Attraction* was one of the much-discussed film's key talking points. But several years before that, another major-studio psychothriller had its final reel completely reworked, thanks to loose lips on the part of one of its high-profile actors — and near as I can tell, FANGORIA was the only outlet that reported on it.

It was a small blurb, barely an inch high, tucked away in the back pages of issue #17 as part of the Monster Invasion section. Concerning a movie then called *Stab*, directed by Robert Benton and described as a "Jacqueline-the-Ripper tale," it noted that the release had been delayed and re-editing was underway. The tinkering, it conjectured, "[may have] something to do with the fact that one of its stars recently revealed the surprise ending of *Stab* in the course of a press conference concerning a different picture."

Sure enough, when the movie opened under the new title *Still of the Night* in November 1982, the climactic revelation was very different from the one blabbed by none other than Meryl Streep. Extensive searching online and in newspaper archives hasn't uncovered any further reportage of this reshoot and the reason behind it, leaving no other conclusion to be drawn than that, yes, Streep's spoiler forced the movie back before the cameras. In fact, she gave two spoilers... but we'll get to that in a moment.

First, a bit of backstory on the film, on which this wasn't the first troubling of the waters. The project had its origins back in the mid-'70s, when up-and-coming scripter/director Benton and his writing partner David Newman were approached to pen a remake of Alfred Hitchcock's Jack the Ripper film *The Lodger*. Turning down that idea, the duo instead decided to tackle an original screenplay called *Terror* involving a female murderer, and the psychiatrist who falls in love with her. Development of the project was interrupted when Benton got the chance to direct his script for the divorce drama *Kramer vs. Kramer*. The result was a massive box-office and critical hit that won Academy Awards for Benton as both writer and director and Streep as supporting actress.

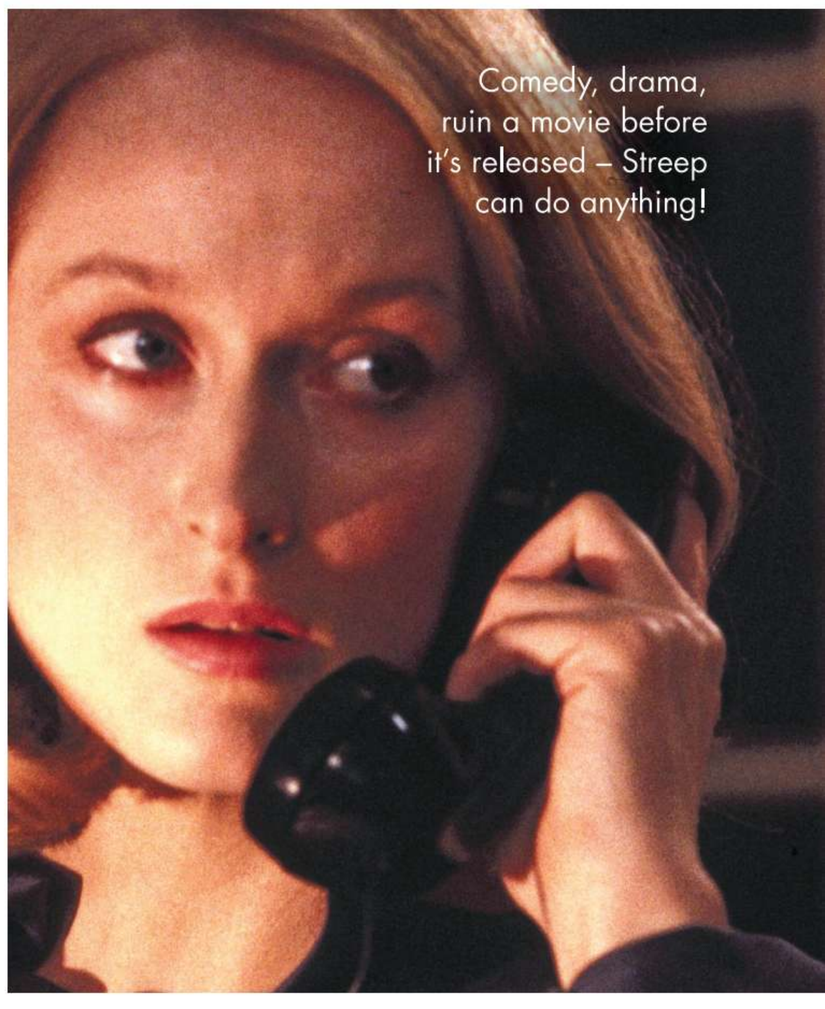
And so it was that when Benton came back to the *Terror* project, rewriting it and rechristening it *Stab*, Streep was his choice to play Brooke Reynolds, the mysterious mistress of a murdered art dealer whose shrink, Dr. Sam Rice, becomes infatuated with her even as she becomes a suspect in the crime—and subsequent killings. Paul Newman and Robert Redford were considered for the Dr. Rice role, but the trouble began when Streep reportedly objected to Benton's eventual choice, Roy Scheider (Reached for comment on the matter, Benton insisted that Streep's misgivings had nothing to do with Scheider, but with script issues). Then, after production began in New York City in March 1981, Streep wound up in the same studio dressing room she'd had on *Kramer*, but Scheider insisted she find another one because *he'd* had that room while making *All That Jazz* and wanted it back for himself.

Nonetheless, the film wrapped and United Artists targeted a February '82 release. Then came the October '81 NYC press conference for Streep's historical romantic drama *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. Attending Boston Globe reporter Bruce McCabe described what happened when the subject turned to *Stab*:

> *"I play this murderer—" she begins. Somebody cautions her that perhaps she shouldn't give herself away like that.*
> *"OK, strike that," she says.*

It was a surprising slip of the tongue for such a smart, conscientious actress as Streep — and the really startling thing was, she doubled down on it. That second one I saw myself, during a televised awards show. I can't recall which one it was, but I distinctly remember Scheider on stage, introducing Streep, saying he was especially pleased to be doing so "because her next movie, *Stab*, co-stars ... me!" Streep then took the podium and smiled, "I murder him in that one!" before catching herself and muttering something like, "I probably shouldn't be saying that..."

But the damage, evidently, was done. The film was bumped out of February, and when it finally emerged nine months later, Streep's Brooke was no longer the culprit. I won't spoil the new ending, but suffice it to say that a minor supporting character was shoehorned into being the villain, as deduced by Dr. Rice through a contrived combination of dream analysis and word association. There was one more change along the way: When the movie was test-screened in summer '82, some in the audience were disappointed at the classical Hitchcockian thriller Benton delivered, instead of the violent shocker *Stab* suggested. Thus, the more elegant *Still of the Night* became the new moniker.



Comedy, drama, ruin a movie before it's released – Streep can do anything!

The title switch didn't help, though. Unable to capitalize on Benton's goodwill from *Kramer*, *Still of the Night* received mediocre reviews (some noting the awkwardness of the closing scenes) and negligible box office. Benton rebounded two years later with the farm drama *Places in the Heart*, which won him another Best Screenplay Oscar and Best Actress for Sally Field (occasioning her famous "You like me!" speech), and Streep, of course, became a consistent Academy Awards darling. In later interviews, she claimed that *Still of the Night* was one of the biggest disappointments of her career.

Though if she had any thoughts about its ending then, she kept them to herself. 💀

By Eric Vespe

A TALE OF TWO ENDINGS

The 1983 adaptation of Stephen King's CUJO made a pointed choice to change one of the author's darkest endings. Was it the right call?

There's a point in 1983's Cujo when Dee Wallace's Donna Trenton has seemingly won her multi-day battle against the rabid Saint Bernard that had her and her young son trapped in a baking hot Ford Pinto. She returns to the car, wounded but triumphant, only to find that her son has stopped breathing.

Donna quickly performs mouth to mouth resuscitation on the child, and – after a dramatic beat or two – young Danny Pintauro takes a rasping breath, yanked back from death's door at the last possible second. Of course, the monstrous dog, Cujo, takes this moment to pull a slasher/bad guy move and return for one final scare, but Donna Trenton is more than up to the task: she finishes that rascal off, and that's when the absent father finally shows up and the fractured family is reunited, presumably to live happily ever after.

Donna (Dee Wallace) and Tad (Danny Pintauro) deviating from the novel's climax.

It's a great movie ending, but it's not the ending Stephen King wrote. His book ends close to the same way, except that when Donna Trenton tries to resuscitate Tad, the boy never comes back. On the surface it's a simple change, and one that the creative team on the movie knew was imperative. Those discussions were going on well before cameras started rolling on the feature adaptation.

"I remember Dan Blatt, our producer, and I had a discussion about it before shooting," Dee Wallace told FANGORIA in a new interview. "I told him I thought it would be crazy to put everyone through the two hours of horror without any payoff at the end. We all agreed."

Wallace went on to say she was angry when that character, who she was preparing to play, went through hell only to lose her son, anyway, and that was a feeling she shared with a whole lot of readers at the time.

"Stephen King contacted him after, saying he was so happy we changed the ending, because he had never gotten so much hate mail as when he killed the boy at the end of *Cujo*."

When I pressed a little more about the depth that comes with King's ending, notably how the death of their son bringing Donna and Vic Trenton together and saving their broken marriage must have been appealing to her as a performer, she made no bones about avoiding that aspect of the character, saying simply "*Cujo* asked me to do about everything possible as an actress."

Wallace is a firm believer in the adage "Never kill kids or animals" in movies, and if they're going to kill poor ol' Cujo, the movie couldn't cross that line twice and also kill the kid.

King being onboard with the change isn't a huge surprise. He has always been able to separate his books from their adaptations. Well, almost always, as anybody who has ever heard him trashtalk Stanley Kubrick's stab at *The Shining* will tell you, but for the most part he's happy to let filmmakers go their own way while adapting his stories. But there is something of note about King's original ending that says a lot about the author. First of all, it's one of the best examples of how his fairly unusual writing process can lead to surprises, even for the guy behind the typewriter. King doesn't outline and very rarely makes any kind of plan. He just sits and writes and lets the story be what the story is going to be.

In a 1983 talk at the Billerica Library, King revealed that Tad's death was as much a shock to him as it eventually was to the reader.

"He wasn't supposed to die," King told the small gathering in Massachusetts. "He was just gone... and just wouldn't come back."

Tad Trenton was the first of King's child protagonists to not make it to the end. Yes, he's had young characters die in his books from the very beginning, whether we're talking about all those high school kids who didn't make it out of the prom in Carrie or the Glick brothers in *'Salem's Lot*, but up until *Cujo*, any main kid was likely safe in a Stephen King story. Danny Torrance in *The Shining* made it out, as did Mark Petrie from *Salem's Lot*, and Charlie McGee from *Firestarter*.

Tad dying at the end of *Cujo* spoke to a true fear that King held in his heart.

"One of the things that really does frighten me is the idea of coming in some night to check on my kids... and finding one of them dead," King said in that very same Billerica talk. "I think most of the time the kids get away, but we also know, as adults – thinking, rational people – that sometimes they don't."

This is a theme King would explore many times over the course of his writing, most notably in *Pet Sematary*, and Tad Trenton had the unfortunate honor of being the first time King addressed that fear head on in his work.

There's both therapeutic and superstitious thinking at work here. King said that if you write about the boogeyman taking someone else's children, well, maybe they'll never show up and take your own. It's a way for him to face every parent's greatest fear, to deal with it in a safe manner. That understanding and his ability to wield that very emotional tool is what makes him the master. 💀

Lewis Teague's adaptation of King's novel presented a much-changed finale.

Christina Ricci's Scrapbook of Scary

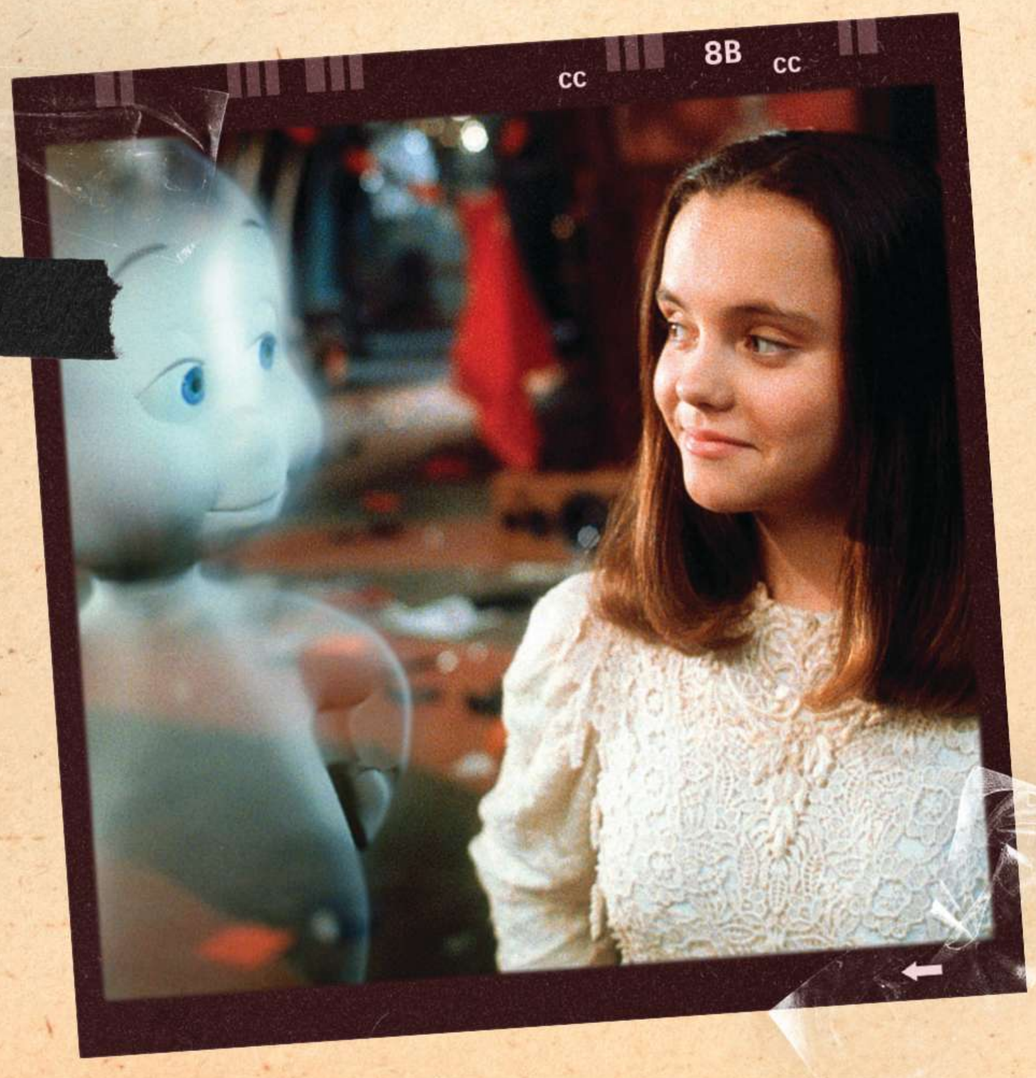
By Angel Melanson

Never one to shy away from darker material, actress Christina Ricci has played in the horror sandbox for her entire career, and the result is a CV that doubles as a mosaic of the many different tones found within the genre.

While promoting *Monstrous*, her most recent entry into the canon of creepy, we asked the icon to share her feelings and memories about her various macabre milestones.

The Addams Family/Wednesday

"I loved doing those movies and I'm still really proud of them. All I can say for now about Netflix's *Wednesday* is that Jenna Ortega is amazing. Her Wednesday is so charming and smart and has so much dignity. There are certain classic roles — in theater, especially, but also in film — that have been played by different actors throughout the years and various generations; I view Wednesday in the same way."



Casper

"*Casper* was a fun movie. There were a lot of special effects, so I was usually on set by myself, but I didn't really mind that so much. Incredible, huge sets on the Universal lot."

Sleepy Hollow

"That experience was awesome. I mean, talk about incredible sets and production value. It was so grand, the scale of that film. I think that's the most impressive production design I've ever worked with."

Cursed

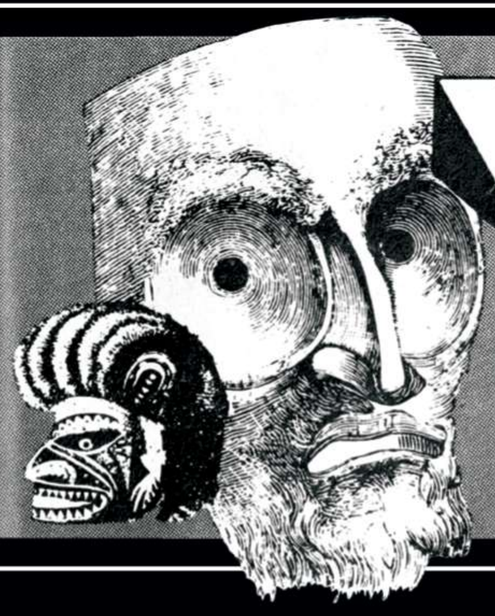
"We made *Cursed* three times. So it was really long. And sometimes I can't remember which ending is in the movie when people ask me about it. I think the last one we filmed was the best."

Yellowjackets

"The fact that it has hit so hard and been so successful and people love it so much is really fantastic. And Misty is a really great character to play. And if you are going to play the same character for potentially seven years, Misty's pretty good, although I did take that quiz and I didn't get Misty. I can't remember who I got. I think I might have gotten Lottie."

Monstrous

"It's such a success, especially when you keep in mind that it is an extremely low-budget period film, to execute all that stuff without it being laughable at all. The '50s horror theme is something they really lean into aesthetically. And (director) Chris Sivertson managed to do it in such a way that it's not laughable or dismissible, and people generally don't do that, because the fear is it will open the movie up too much to criticism. But this kind of goes above that, which is really great."



NIGHTMARE LIBRARY

BY AHLISSA EICHHORN

THE CLACKITY

DUE OUT:
6/28/2022

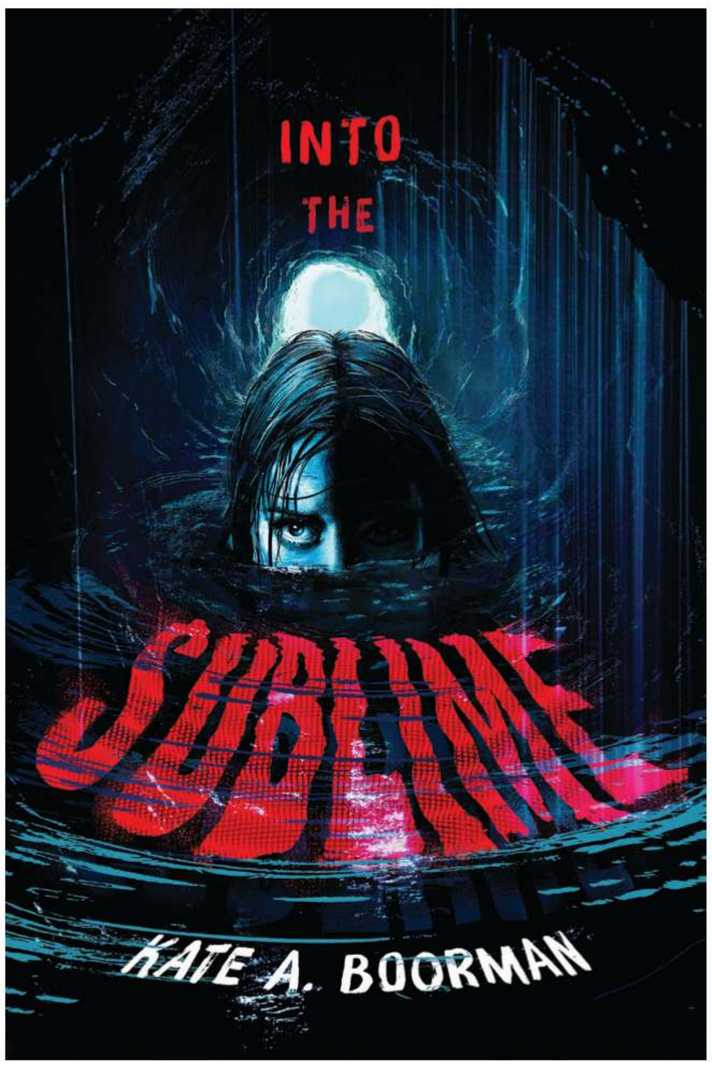
AUTHOR:
Lora Senf

PUBLISHER:
Atheneum Books for Young Readers

Soon-to-be-teen Evie lives in Blight Harbor, a town known for its ghostly inhabitants and general off-kilter style. When her aunt, the local paranormal columnist, goes missing after investigating the abandoned abattoir, Evie must make a dangerous deal with a warped entity known as The Clackity. With a bit of luck and a lot of courage, she ventures into an unknown domain to save her aunt from permanent death and deliver the restless spirit of the notorious serial killer, John Jeffrey Pope.

The Clackity is a hodge-podge of fright and enchantment. Readers will feel at home with its fairy tales, witches, and helpful woodland creatures, but chilled by unspeakable darkness and real-life terrors. Think *Alice In Wonderland* with sprinklings of *Coraline* and Roald Dahl.

The topics of bravery and confidence here juxtapose against those of grief and change. It's a highly encouraging story for young readers, one that grabs them by the shoulders to say, "It's okay to be scared; just do the thing!" But because of Senf's carefully chosen symbolism, this allegory for growing up and going through life appeals to virtually every generation. After all, navigating mutinous territory while staying true to yourself and being there for loved ones is what life's all about, bloodthirsty ghosts be damned.



INTO THE SUBLIME

DUE OUT:
7/26/2022

AUTHOR:
Kate A. Boorman

PUBLISHER:
Henry Holt & Co.

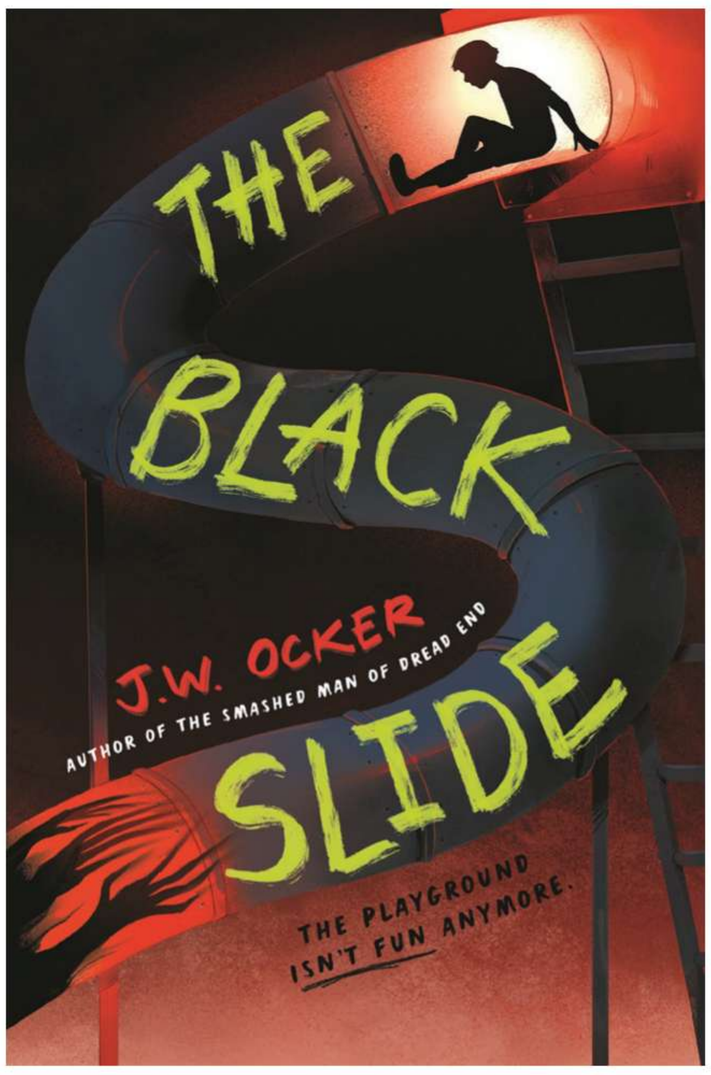
Colorado legend speaks of The Sublime, a lake that lies dormant underground with the power to change those who uncover it. Four thrill-seeking teenagers make their pilgrimage to it, each laden with distrust and carrying their secret agenda. They learn too late that they'll have to let their worst fears come to light to unlock the actual lore. But only one tells their story to the police, and she's covered in someone else's blood.

Claustrophobic and slippery with surprises, this supernatural thriller takes place in one of the most overwhelmingly eerie cave systems to exist on the page. It's an excellent setting for a coming-of-age story, for caves are misleading, often dark, and incredibly challenging to the psyche. You won't find any romantic plot lines here, only neck-breaking twists and *The Descent*-like endurance trials. Boorman captures that sense of teen invincibility with her defined characters. Their lack of vulnerability is their only shield, and they have to keep it up, no matter how much they lie or deny. The overarching tension becomes progressively tangible with an unreliable narrator and seriously creepy descriptions.

In a word, *Into the Sublime* is strangely therapeutic (whoops, two words.) It pushes us to expose hidden wounds so that we may take accountability and evolve into a stronger version of ourselves.

THERE'S AN OFT-OVERLOOKED AVENUE OF HORROR CONTENT

It's not stage productions or podcasts — it's children's books! A ghastly goldmine of talent lurks between the covers of these kid-friendly frights, and you're missing out if you don't make a pitstop at the Young Adult section in your favorite bookstore. And hey, it's summer break! What better time to get your little monster to read more horror?



THE BLACK SLIDE

DUE OUT:
8/16/2022

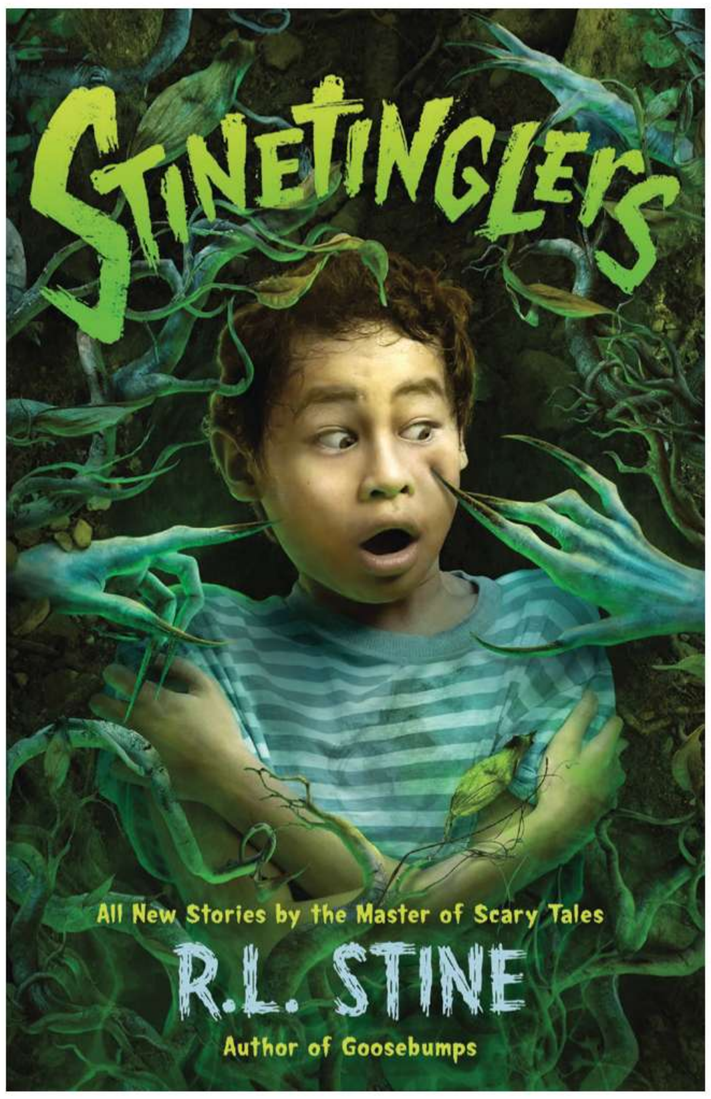
AUTHOR:
J.W. Ocker

PUBLISHER:
HarperCollins

School is hard enough without having to deal with otherworldly playground equipment. But after going down the mysterious black slide one recess, that's exactly what fifth-grade Griffin must do. In the slide, he discovers a terrifying dimension that thrives on pain, torture, and breaking soft souls. The stony beings in this bleak world live to experiment on human children, like his best friend and their classmates. Can he make it through the suffering to rescue them and their world without crumbling under pressure?

What makes this bizarre middle-grade story so successful is its lack of rules. It's a free range of terror anyone can walk through, deciphering their own meanings as they get their bearings. There's plenty to take away: topics of domestic violence, bullying, friendship, resilience, and the like. While that's admittedly heavy, Ocker uses enough deft humor throughout to balance out the mood.

The Black Slide makes an appreciable nod to *Hellraiser* and other iconic horror tales, but it doesn't hold back on the weird or the scares despite its age range. Under the lens, it's a somber read about the inevitable trials of hurt we endure as people, and it gives an endearing warning never to let life harden your heart.



STINETINGLERS

DUE OUT:
8/30/2022

AUTHOR:
R.L. Stine

PUBLISHER:
Feiwel & Friends

The celebrated children's author is back at it with bite-sized lessons of morality and good conscience with a spooky twist. Readers encounter monsters, magic books, time warps, and more to reel in a whole new generation of horror kids in this cleverly-named collection.

The cadence and deadpan humor of the author are wholly familiar in *Stinetinglers*, almost as if Stine himself stopped time. The keenest difference older fans will pick out is the updated technology used by the characters (smartwatches and cellphones and Minecraft, oh my) and the micro introductions written before each short story. Serious or not, these snippets on Stine's inspiration are a lighthearted first step into mildly eerie territory.

The twists are there, but the morals of the stories stand out. Not only does the author tell readers that their bad behavior has consequences but that they also should live a little. One tale warns of being "too good" and the strange benefit of letting your mischievous side out every now and then. Another says to love your life, for it could always be worse. Call them creepy, fun, or a combination of both, the tales in *Stinetinglers* prove that old dogs can still give you goosebumps.

Contributors' Crypt

Below are social media handles for some of this issue's contributors. Don't make it weird!

Sean Abley - @GayoftheDead

Brian Collins - @BrianWCollins

Barbara Crampton - @barbaracrampton

Ahlissa Eichhorn - @hauntedeadlines

Brett Gallman - @brettgallman

Chantal Handley - @ChantalHandley

Stephen Graham Jones - @SGJ72

Dr. Rachel Knightley - @DrRKnightley

Aaron B. Koontz - @AaronBKoontz

Christopher Nelson - @cnelsonfx

Richard Newby - @RICHARDLNEWBY

Mallory O'Meara - @malloryomeara

Jordan Peele - @JordanPeele

Jolene Richardson - @JoMarieDesigns

Julieann Stipidis - @TheJulMarie

Eric Vespe - @EricVespe

Dwayne Wingert - @DwayneWingert

Things to Come

This fall: HALLOWEEN ENDS! HELLRAISER! TERRIFIER 2! And the untold true story of the TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE III trailer! (Has anyone noticed this section is usually 80% wild guesses? Don't tell anyone.)

CLASSIFIED AD VAULT

Looking for a podcast celebrating all things spooky? Check out the Happy Harvest Horror Show wherever you get your podcasts!

Are you a young filmmaker with a story to tell? Screenager Productions (the team behind *Satan's Servant*) wants to develop your short film idea. We're specifically looking for horror shorts set in college. Contact us at screenagerfilms@gmail.com!

It's been 25 years. End the cover-up and release *GORDY'S HOME* on DVD!

Do you enjoy comedy & horror. Check out the Spooky Doings podcast! Interviews, discussions and tutorials with 2 improv comedians available on Apple, Spotify and podbean.

@Piercalicious - animated show about talking dinosaurs in college - #qgtm / #dinoversity /#womeninheritearth

The dæmon-sultan Azathoth requires minds and bodies for His unwholesome psychotronic harvest. Are you willing to dive deep into the plasma pool? Email me and let's talk.

You're the #1 stunna Loksta! Thanks for always supporting us!

Thanks for putting up with me, Gomes. Let's do another 20 and see how it goes <3

Love the way horror makes you feel? Explore how and why on The Beauty of Horror Podcast! FEEL THE HORROR... SPREAD THE BEAUTY

Love vintage horror advertisements, old movie listings, retro articles, and nostalgic merchandise? Follow me on Twitter! @TabloidTerrors

Jazz Hands AKA the Dilophosaurus needs his own show on FANGORIA.

HorrorGirl here, it's my birthday month and Fango anniversary! I just wanted to say a big hello and thank you to all you creeps for making this one hell of a year. Catch you on the interwebs. Tell me somethin' good. Dial into the HorrorGirl Hotline @ 323-457-3963

I build custom horror-themed guitars! They are expensive and take me forever! Each guitar is designed to shred appropriately to the movie it's inspired by, no corners cut. Email me at mattfnyeager@gmail.com for more info!

Eli was railroaded. #JusticeForEli

mum and dad (Margaret and Norm) I miss you both more than anything, love your son Mark XXXOOO

Heard U crunching on chips n' candy at Packanack Lodge on Friday the 13th crying sumpin' about "STF def"...you made me LAUGH!

#MakeMoreKaijuMovies

Buffalo Hardcore 716 Forever. Horror Rules Too.

The Gordy story isn't real. Sorry! - PN

Will *Star Wars* ever make a horror movie? That Wampa is pretty scary, make a movie about one of those.

Oregon Gothic, The House on Clark Boulevard, Aftermath: Boise, Idaho and Remarkable Women of Brokenheart Lane, by Ann Wuehler, available now on Amazon, etc. Coming soon – The Adventures of Grumpy Odin and Sexy Jesus. Horror, fantasy, sci fi, kitchen sink reality at times, take your pick.

Thank you to my parents, Mark and Sonia. Mom, if you are reading this, thank you for introducing me to horror and science fiction. Without your support I wouldn't be here today making this magazine. - Jason K.

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